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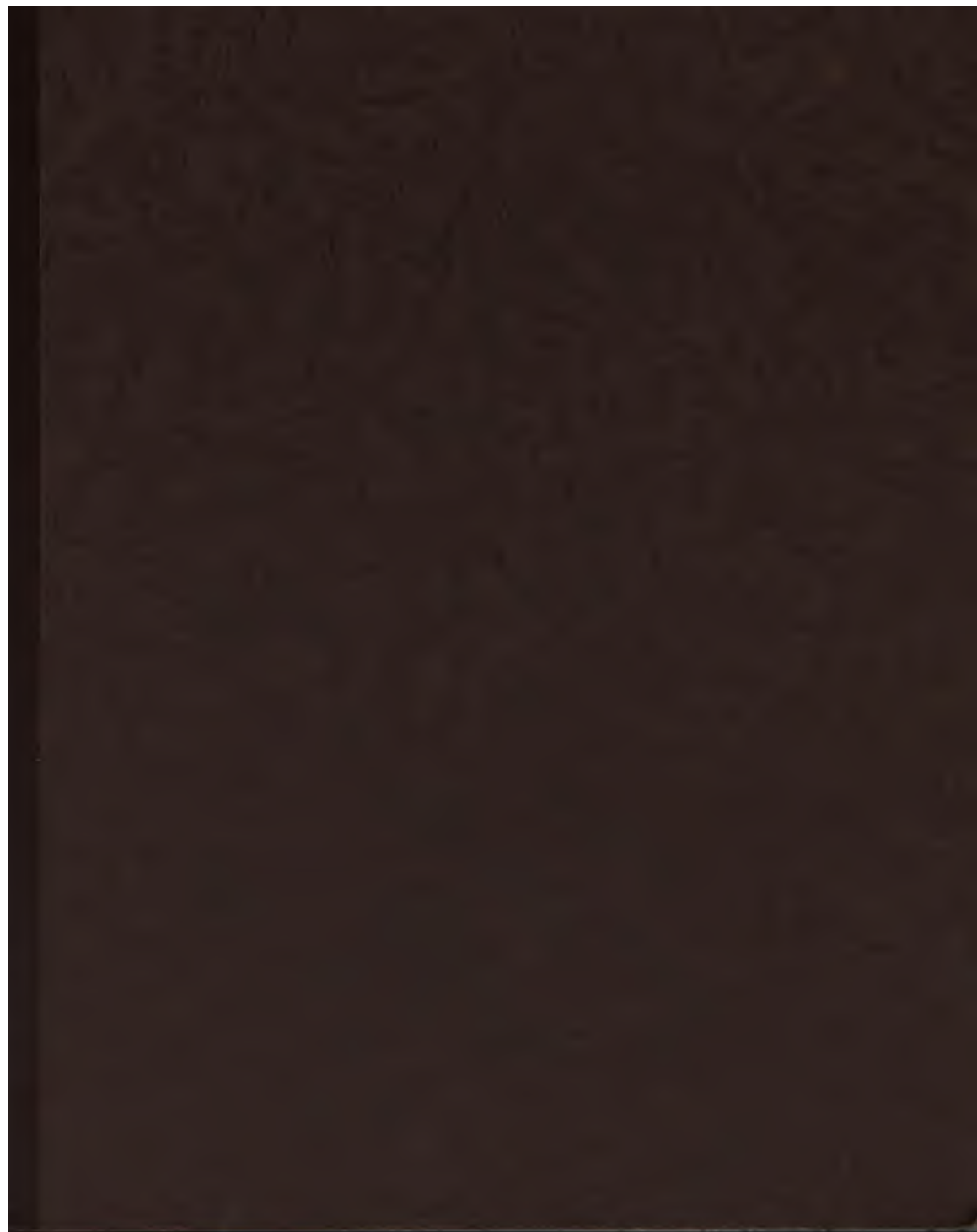
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## **THE STORY OF DAVID GRAY**

*400 copies of this book have  
been printed on Van Gelder  
hand-made paper, and the  
type distributed.*









# The Story of David Gray

By Robert Buchanan



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## **PREFACE**





## PREFACE


**W**HEN David Gray's little book of verses came out in the Spring of 1862 he had been dead only a few months.<sup>1</sup> On this side the Atlantic the drums and trampings of Civil War silenced for awhile these faint and far off strains. Three years later the book was published here,<sup>2</sup> including an earlier and hastily written Memoir, which last, in 1868, revised and augmented, (together with the poems *To David in Heaven* and *Poet*

*"The Luggie"*

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<sup>1</sup> (1) *The Luggie and other Poems*. By David Gray. With a Memoir by James Hedderwick, and a Prefatory Notice by R. M. Milnes, M. P. Fcap 8vo. Cambridge, 1862.

<sup>(2)</sup> The Same. New edition, 1885.

<sup>(3)</sup> *The Luggie and other Poems*. By David Gray. Edited by Henry Glassford Bell. Cr. 8vo. Glasgow, 1874.

<sup>(4)</sup> The Same. New edition, 1886.

<sup>2</sup> *Poems by David Gray*. With *Memoirs of His Life*. 12mo. Boston, 1865.

David  
Gray's  
portrait

*Andrew*,) was finally put forth by Mr. Buchanan in a volume entitled *David Gray, and other Essays chiefly on Poetry*. From this source we now reprint the Memoir entire,—a story not to be read “without a renewed sense of tears in mortal things.”<sup>1</sup>

The poet's portrait is from a small wood-cut on the title page of the 1868 Essays. It has been enlarged and, as reproduced by one of Mr. Edward Bierstadt's exquisite processes, fully bears out all that we are told concerning Gray's youthful features. It is the face of one whom even unseen we could not choose but love.

Recently we had occasion to say: “If Robert Buchanan should ever win pardon for his early and late abuse of men who are his betters it would

<sup>1</sup> “A large portion of it appeared some years ago in the ‘Cornhill Magazine,’ but the additions, now first published, are very important. It is a story known and told as only one could know and tell it; and will, I trust, send still more readers to Gray's wonderful poems. The little green-bound duodecimo, . . . was wafted out unto the great world, heralded by a kindly preface and a brief memoir. It excited little or no comment. The exquisite music was too low and tender to attract crowds, or to entice coteries delighted with the scream of the whipper-snapper. Nevertheless, a few rare spirits heard and welcomed the truest, purest, tenderest lyrical note that has floated to English ears this half-century.” (Preface to *David Gray and other Essays, Chiefly on Poetry*. London, 1868.)



be for some such act of love as his tender tribute to the memory of David Gray. It remains the most beautiful thing in his uncritical and contentious life." Yes, it would still plead for him though heaven and earth were silent.

We cannot more fittingly close these brief remarks than by quoting the pathetic lines which Amy Levy years afterwards inscribed to another dead poet,—herself so soon to pass into the sunless land,—words of "finalé and farewell" one would fain recall when either singer is present in the heart:

*Amy Levy's  
poem:*

*I knew not if to laugh or weep;  
They sat and talked of you —  
'Twas here he sat; 'twas this he said!  
'Twas that he used to do.*

*"To a  
Dead Poet"*

---

<sup>1</sup> See Foreword to *In the Shadows* (The Bibelot, Vol. VI, pp. 178-9). The Saturday Reviewer of that day saw the matter quite as clearly:

"The history of David Gray is full of melancholy interest; less tragic, it is true, than that of Chatterton, less absorbing, because of the infinitely smaller proportions of the central figure, than that of Keats, and yet simple enough and sad enough to win the regretful sympathies of every reader. . . . It is unfair," this critic concludes, "that his story, well and simply told as it is, should have to contend against the dead weight of the rest of the book." (*The Saturday Review*, xxvi, 372.)

*"Here is the book wherein he read,  
The room wherein he dwell;  
And he" (they said) "was such a man,  
Such things he thought and felt."*

*I sat and sat, I did not stir;  
They talked and talked away.  
I was as mute as any stone,  
I had no word to say.*

*They talked and talked; like to a stone  
My heart grew in my breast—  
I, who had never seen your face  
Perhaps I knew you best.*



**TO DAVID IN HEAVEN**

*Seers there are also who gaze at one aspect of nature, so lost in looking that they can only cry, "See! see!" The light streams straight into their eyes; they will not stir, lest it die away;—they desire no verification beyond the tears on their own cheeks, the ache in their own hearts. Such an one was David Gray.*

ROBERT BUCHANAN.



## TO DAVID IN HEAVEN

### I.

**L**OO! the slow moon roaming  
Through fleecy mists of gloaming,  
Furrowing with pearly edge the jewel-  
powdered sky!  
Lo, the bridge moss-laden,  
Arched like foot of maiden,  
And on the bridge, in silence, looking upward, you  
and I!  
Lo, the pleasant season  
Of reaping and of mowing—  
The round still moon above,—beneath, the river  
duskily flowing!

### II.

Violet-coloured shadows,  
Blown from scented meadows,  
Float o'er us to the pine-wood dark from yonder  
dim corn-ridge;  
The little river gushes  
Through shady sedge and rushes,

And gray gnats murmur o'er the pools, beneath  
the mossy bridge ;—  
And you and I stand darkly,  
O'er the keystone leaning,  
And watch the pale mesmeric moon, in the time  
of gleaners and gleaning.

## III.

Do I dream, I wonder?  
As, sitting sadly under  
A lonely roof in London, through the grim square  
pane I gaze?  
Here of you I ponder,  
In a dream, and yonder  
The still streets seem to stir and breathe beneath  
the white moon's rays.  
By the vision cherished,  
By the battle bravèd,  
Do I but dream a hopeless dream, in the city that  
slew you, David?

## IV.

Is it fancy also,  
That the light which falls so  
Faintly upon the stony street below me as I write,  
Near tall mountains passes  
Through churchyard weeds and grasses,  
Barely a mower's mile away from that small bridge,  
to-night?

And, where you are lying,—  
Grass and flowers above you—  
Is mingled with your sleeping face, as calm as the  
hearts that love you?

## v.

Poet gentle-hearted,  
Are you then departed,  
And have you ceased to dream the dream we loved  
of old so well?  
Has the deeply cherished  
Aspiration perished,  
And are you happy, David, in that heaven where  
you dwell?  
Have you found the secret  
We, so wildly, sought for,  
And is your soul enswathed, at last, in the singing  
robes you fought for?

## vi.

In some heaven star-lighted,  
Are you now united  
Unto the poet-spirits that you loved, of English  
race?  
Is Chatterton still dreaming?  
And, to give it stately seeming,  
Has the music of his last strong song passed into  
Keats's face?

Is Wordsworth there? and Spenser?  
Beyond the grave's black portals,  
Can the grand eye of Milton *see* the glory he sang  
to mortals?

## VII.

You at least could teach me,  
Could your dear voice reach me,  
Where I sit and copy out for men my soul's strange  
speech,  
Whether it be bootless,  
Profitless, and fruitless,—  
The weary aching upward strife to heights we  
cannot reach,  
The fame we seek in sorrow,  
The agony we forego not,  
The haunting singing sense that makes us climb  
— whither we know not.

## VIII.

Must it last for ever,  
The passionate endeavour,  
Ay, have ye, there in heaven, hearts to throb and  
still aspire?  
In the life you know now,  
Rendered white as snow now,  
Do fresher glory-heights arise, and beckon higher  
— higher?



Are you dreaming, dreaming,  
Is your soul still roaming,  
Still gazing upward as we gazed, of old in the  
autumn gloaming?

## IX.

Lo, the book I hold here,  
In the city cold here !  
I hold it with a gentle hand and love it as I may ;  
Lo, the weary moments !  
Lo, the icy comments !  
And lo, false Fortune's knife of gold swift-lifted up  
to slay !  
Has the strife no ending ?  
Has the song no meaning ?  
Linger I, idle as of old, while men are reaping or  
gleaning ?

## X.

Upward my face I turn to you,  
I long for you, I yearn to you,  
The spectral vision trances me to utt'rance wild  
and weak ;  
It is not that I mourn you,  
To mourn you were to scorn you,  
For you are one step nearer to the beauty singers  
seek.

But I want, and cannot see you,  
I seek and cannot find you,  
And, see! I touch the book of songs you tenderly  
left behind you!

## XI.

Ay, me! I bend above it,  
With tearful eyes, and love it,  
With tender hand I touch the leaves, but cannot  
find you there!  
Mine eyes are haunted only  
By that gloaming sweetly lonely,  
The shadows on the mossy bridge, the glamour  
in the air!  
I touch the leaves, and only  
See the glory they retain not—  
The moon that is a lamp to Hope, who glorifies  
what we gain not!

## XII.

The aching and the yearning,  
The hollow undiscerning,  
Uplooking want I still retain, darken the leaves  
I touch—  
Pale promise, with much sweetness  
Solemnizing incompleteness,  
But ah, you knew so little then—and now you  
know so much!

By the vision cherished,  
By the battle bravèd,  
Have you, in heaven, shamed the song, by a  
loftier music, David?

## XIII.

I, who loved and knew you,  
In the city that slew you,  
Still hunger on, and thirst, and climb, proud-  
hearted and alone :  
Serpent-fears enfold me,  
Syren-visions hold me,  
And, like a wave, I gather strength, and gathering  
strength, I moan ;  
Yea, the pale moon beckons,  
Still I follow, aching,  
And gather strength, only to make a louder moan,  
in breaking !

## XIV.

Though the world could turn from you,  
This, at least, I learn from you :  
Beauty and Truth, though never found, are worthy  
to be sought,  
The singer, upward-springing,  
Is grander than his singing,  
And tranquil self-sufficing joy illumines the dark of  
thought.

This, at least, you teach me,  
In a revelation :  
That gods still snatch, as worthy death, the soul  
in its aspiration.

## XV.

And I think, as you thought,  
Poesy and Truth ought  
Never to lie silent in the singer's heart on earth ;  
Though they be discarded,  
Slighted, unrewarded,  
Though, unto vulgar seeming, they appear of little  
worth, —  
Yet tender brother-singers,  
Young or not yet born to us,  
May seek there, for the singer's sake, that love  
which sweeteneth scorn to us !

## XVI.

While I sit in silence,  
Comes from mile on mile hence,  
From English Keats's Roman grave, a voice that  
sweetens toil !  
Think you, no fond creatures  
Draw comfort from the features  
Of Chatterton, pale Phæthon, hurled down to  
sunless soil ?

Scorched with sunlight lying,  
Eyes of sunlight hollow,  
But, see ! upon the lips a gleam of the chrism of  
Apollo !

## XVII.

Noble thought produces  
Noble ends and uses,  
Noble hopes are part of Hope wherever she may be,  
Noble thought enhances  
Life and all its chances,  
And noble self is noble song,—all this I learn  
from thee !  
And I learn, moreover,  
'Mid the city's strife too,  
That such faint song as sweetens Death can  
sweeten the singer's life too !

## XVIII.

Lo, my Book !—I hold it  
In weary hands, and fold it  
Unto my heart, if only as a token I aspire ;  
And, by song's assistance,  
Unto your dim distance,  
My soul uplifted is on wings, and beckoned higher,  
nigher.  
By the sweeter wisdom  
You return unspeaking,

Though endless, hopeless, be the search, we exalt  
our souls in seeking.

## XIX.

Higher, yet, and higher,  
Ever nigher, ever nigher,  
To the glory we conceive not, let us toil and strive  
and strain! —  
The agonized yearning,  
The imploring and the burning,  
Grown awfuller, intenser, at each vista we attain,  
And clearer, brighter, growing,  
Up the gulfs of heaven wander,  
Higher, higher yet, and higher, to the Mystery we  
ponder!

## XX.

Yea, higher yet, and higher,  
Ever nigher, ever nigher,  
While men grow small by stooping and the reaper  
piles the grain, —  
Can it then be bootless,  
Profitless and fruitless,  
The weary aching upward search for what we  
never gain?  
Is there not awaiting  
Rest and golden weather,  
Where, passionately purified, the singers may  
meet together?

## XXI.

Up ! higher yet, and higher,  
Ever nigher, ever nigher,  
Through voids that Milton and the rest beat still  
    with seraph-wings ;  
    Out through the great gate creeping  
    Where God hath put his sleeping—  
A dewy cloud detaining not the soul that soars and  
    sings ;  
Up ! higher yet, and higher  
Fainting nor retreating,  
Beyond the sun, beyond the stars, to the far bright  
    realm of meeting !

## XXII.

O Mystery ! O Passion !  
To sit on earth, and fashion,  
What floods of music visibled may fill that fancied  
    place !  
To think, the least that singeth,  
Aspireth and upspringeth,  
May weep glad tears on Keats's breast and look in  
    Milton's face !  
When human power and failure  
Are equalized for ever,  
And the one great Light that haloes all is the  
    passionate bright endeavour !

## XXIII.

But ah, that pale moon roaming  
Through fleecy mists of gloaming,  
Furrowing with pearly edge the jewel-powdered  
sky,  
And ah, the days departed  
With your friendship gentle-hearted,  
And ah, the dream we dreamt that night, together,  
you and I !  
Is it fashioned wisely,  
To help us or to blind us,  
That at each height we gain we turn, and behold  
a heaven behind us?





## **THE STORY OF DAVID GRAY**

*Two friends, in interchange of heart and soul ;  
But suddenly Death changed his countenance,  
And graved him in the darkness, far from me.*

*The Luggie*, by DAVID GRAY.

*Quem Di diligunt, adolescens moritur.*



## THE STORY OF DAVID GRAY

**S**ITUATED in a by-road, about a mile from the small town of Kirkintilloch, and eight miles from the city of Glasgow, stands a cottage one storey high, roofed with slate, and surrounded by a little kitchen-garden. A whitewashed lobby, leading from the front to the back-door, divides this cottage into two sections; to the right, is a roof fitted up as a hand-loom weaver's workshop; to the left is a kitchen paved with stone, and opening into a tiny carpeted bedroom.

In the workshop, a father, daughter, and sons worked all day at the loom. In the kitchen, a handsome cheery Scottish matron busied herself like a thrifty housewife, and brought the rest of the family about her at meals. All day long the soft hum of the loom was heard in the workshop; but when night came, mysterious doors were thrown open, and the family retired to sleep in extraordinary mural recesses.

Kirkintilloch

In this humble home, David Gray, a hand-loom weaver, resided for upwards of twenty years, and managed to rear a family of eight children—five boys and three girls. His eldest son, David, author of “The Luggie and other Poems,” is the hero of the present true history.

*Birth,*  
29th January,  
1838

David was born on the 29th of January, 1838. He alone, of all the little household, was destined to receive a decent education. From early childhood, the dark-eyed little fellow was noted for his wit and cleverness; and it was the dream of his father's life that he should become a scholar. At the parish-school of Kirkintilloch he learned to read, write, and cast up accounts, and was, moreover, instructed in the Latin rudiments. Partly through the hard struggles of his parents, and partly through his own severe labours as a pupil-teacher and private tutor, he was afterwards enabled to attend the classes at the Glasgow University. In common with other rough country lads, who live up dark alleys, subsist chiefly on oatmeal and butter forwarded from home, and eventually distinguish themselves in the classroom, he had to fight his way onward amid poverty and privation; but in his brave pursuit of knowledge nothing daunted him. It had been settled at home that he should become a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. Unfortunately, however, he had no love for the pulpit. Early in life he had begun to hanker after the

*Education*

delights of poetical composition. He had devoured the poets from Chaucer to Wordsworth. The yearnings thus awakened in him had begun to express themselves in many wild fragments—contributions, for the most part, to the poet's-corner of a local newspaper—"The Glasgow Citizen."

*Early verses*

Up to this point there was nothing extraordinary in the career or character of David Gray. Taken at his best, he was an average specimen of the persevering young Scottish student. But his soul contained wells of emotion which had not yet been stirred to their depths. When, at fourteen years of age, he began to study in Glasgow, it was his custom to go home every Saturday night in order to pass the Sunday with his parents. These Sundays at home were chiefly occupied with rambles in the neighbourhood of Kirkintulloch; wanderings on the sylvan banks of the Luggie, the beloved little river which flowed close to his father's door. On Luggieside awakened one day the dream which developed all the hidden beauty of his character, and eventually kindled all the faculties of his intellect. Had he been asked to explain the nature of this dream, David would have answered vaguely enough, but he would have said something to the following effect: "I'm thinking none of us are quite contented; there's a climbing impulse to heaven in us all that won't let us rest for a moment. Just now I would be happy if I *knew* a little more.

*Dreams of  
Youth on  
Luggieside*

I'd give ten years of life to see Rome, and Florence, and Venice, and the grand places of old; and to feel that I wasn't a burden on the old folks. I'll be a great man yet! and the old home, the Luggie and Gartshore wood, shall be *famous* for my sake." He could only measure his ambition by the love he bore his home. "I was born, bred, and cared for here, and my folk are buried here. I know every nook and dell for miles around, and they are all dear to me. My own mother and father dwell here, and in my own *wee* room" (the tiny carpeted bedroom above alluded to) "I first learned to read poetry. I love my home; and it is for my home's sake that I love fame."

"I had a  
home—  
it was less  
dear than  
thou"

Nor were that home and its surroundings unworthy of such love. Tiny and unpretending as is Luggie stream, upon its banks lie many nooks of beauty, bowery glimpses of woodland, shady solitudes, places of nestling green for poets made. Not far off stretch the Campsie fells, with dusky nooks between, where the waterfall and the cascade make a silver pleasure in the heart of shadow; and beyond, there are dreamy glimpses of the misty blue mountains themselves. Away to the south-west, lies Glasgow in its smoke, most hideous of cities, wherein the very clangour of church-bells is associated with abominations. Into the heart of that city David was to be slowly drawn, subject to a fascination only death could dispel,—the desire

to make deathless music, and the dream of moving therewith the mysterious heart of man.

At twenty-one years of age; when this dream was strong within him, David was a tall young man, slightly but firmly built, and with a stoop at the shoulders. His head was small, fringed with black curly hair. Want of candour was not his fault, though he seldom looked one in the face; his eyes, however, were large and dark, full of intelligence and humour, harmonizing well with the long thin nose and nervous lips. The great black eyes and woman's mouth betrayed the creature of impulse; one whose reasoning faculties were small, but whose temperament was like red-hot coal. He sympathized with much that was lofty, noble, and true in poetry, and with much that was absurd and suicidal in the poet. He carried sympathy to the highest pitch of enthusiasm; he shed tears over the memories of Keats and Burns, and he was corybantic in his execution of a Scotch "reel." A fine phrase filled him with the rapture of a lover. He admired extremes—from Rabelais to Tom Sayers. Thirsting for human sympathy, which lured him in the semblance of notoriety, he perpetrated all sorts of extravagancies, innocent enough in themselves, but calculated to blind him to the very first principles of art. Yet this enthusiasm, as I have suggested, was his safeguard in at least one respect. Though he believed himself to be a

*Early  
Manhood*

*Father and  
Mother*

genius, he loved the parental roof of the hand-loom weaver.

*The effect of  
David's  
verses upon  
them*

And what thought the weaver and his wife of this wonderful son of theirs? They were proud of him, proud in a silent undemonstrative fashion; for among the Scottish poor concealment of the emotions is held a virtue. During his weekly visits home, David was not overwhelmed with caresses; but he was the subject of conversation night after night, when the old couple talked in bed. Between him and his father there had arisen a strange barrier of reserve. They seldom exchanged with each other more than a passing word; but to one friend's bosom David would often confide the love and tenderness he bore for his over-worked, upright parent. When the boy first began to write verses the old man affected perfect contempt and indifference, but his eyes gloated in secret over the poet's-corners of the Glasgow newspapers. The poor weaver, though an uneducated man, had a profound respect for education and cultivation in others. He felt his heart bound with hope and joy when strangers praised the boy, but he hid the tenderness of his pride under a cold indifference. Although proud of David's talent for writing verses, he was afraid to encourage a pursuit which practical common sense assured him was mere trifling. At a later date he might have spoken out, had not his tongue been frozen by the



belief that advice from him would be held in no esteem by his better educated and more gifted son. Thus, the more David's indications of cleverness and scholarship increased, the more afraid was the old man to express his gratification and give his advice. Equally touching was the point of view taken by David's mother, whose cry was, "The kirk, the free kirk, and nothing but the kirk!" She neither appreciated nor underrated the abilities of her boy, but her proudest wish was that he should become a real live minister, with home and "haudin'" of his own. To see David,—“our David,”—in a pulpit, preaching the Gospel out of a big book, and dwelling in a good house to the end of his days!

*Their best  
laid plans*

But meantime the boy was swiftly undermining all such cherished plans. He had saturated his heart and mind with the intoxicating wines of poesy,—drunken deep of such syrups as only very strong heads indeed can carry calmly. He differed from older and harder poets in this only,—that he had not the trick of disguising his vanity, knew not how to ape humility. The poor lad was moved, maddened by the strange divine light in his eyes, and he cried aloud: "The beauty of the cloudland I have visited! the ideal love of my soul!" Thus he expressed himself, much to the amusement of his hearers. "Solitude," he exclaimed on another occasion, "and an utter want

*The light  
that never  
was on land  
or sea*

of all physical exercise, are working deplorable ravages in my nervous system; the crows'-feet are blackening about my eyes, and I cannot think to face the sunlight. When I ponder over my own inability to move the world, to move one heart in it, no wonder that my face gathers blackness. Tennyson beautifully and (so far) truly says, that the face is 'the form and colour of the mind and life.' If you saw *me!*" His verses written at that period, although abounding with echoes of his two pet poets, show great intensity and the sweetness of perfect feeling. Some of the lyrics in his volume, printed among the Poems Named and without Names, belong to this period. His productions, however, were for the most part close reproductions of the manner of Keats; and so conscious was he of this fact, that in one of these pieces he expressly styled himself, "a foster son of Keats, the dreamily divine." Wordsworth he did not reproduce so much until a later and a purer period. One of these unpublished pieces I shall quote here, to show that David, even at the crude assimilate period, showed "brains" and vision noticeable in a youth of twenty.

"Empedocles"—an  
unpublished  
poem

## EMPEDOCLES

"He who to be deem'd  
A god, leap'd fondly into Ætna flames,—  
Empedocles."—MILTON.

How, in the crystal smooth and azure sky,  
Droop the clear, living sapphires, tremulous  
And inextinguishably beautiful!  
How the calm iridescence of their soft  
Ethereal fire contrasts with the wild flame  
Rising from this doomed mountain like the noise  
Of ocean whirlwinds through the murky air!  
Alone, alone! yearning, ambitious ever!  
Hope's agony! O, ye immortal gods!  
Regally sphered in your keen-silvered orbs,  
Eternal, where fled that authentic fire,  
Stolen by Prometheus ere the pregnant clouds  
Rose from the sea, full of the deluge! Where  
Art thou, white lady of the morning; white  
Aurora, charioted by the fair Hours  
Through amethystine mists weeping soft dews  
Upon the meadow, as Apollo heaves  
His constellation through the liquid dawn?  
Give me Tithonus' gift, thou orient  
Undying Beauty! and my love shall be  
Cherubic worship, and my star shall walk  
The plains of heaven, thy punctual harbinger!  
O with thy ancient power prolong my days  
For ever; tear this flesh-thick cursed life  
Enlinking me to this foul earth, the home  
Of cold mortality, this nether hell!

Rise, mighty conflagrations! and scare wild  
These crowding shadows! *Far on the dim sea*  
*Pale mariners behold thee, and the sails*  
*Shine purpled by thy glare, and the slow oars*  
*Drop ruby, and the trembling human souls*  
*Wonder affrighted as their pitchy barks,*

*Empedocles*

*Guided by Syrian pilots, ripple by  
Hailing for craggy Calpe; O, ye frail  
Weak human souls, I, lone Empedocles,  
Stand here unshivered as a steadfast god,  
Scorning thy puny destinies.*

I float  
To cloud-enrobed Olympus on the wings  
Of a rich dream, swift as the light of stars,  
Swifter than Zophiel or Mercury  
Upon his throne of adamantine gold.—  
Jove sits superior, while the deities  
Tread delicate the smooth cerulean floors.  
Hebe, (with twin breasts, like twin roes that feed  
Among the lilies), in her taper hand  
Bears the bright goblet, rough with gems and gold,  
Filled with ambrosia to the lipping brim.  
O, love and beauty and immortal life!  
O, light divine, ethereal effluence  
Of purity! O, fragrancy of air,  
Spikenard and calamus, cassia and balm,  
With all the frankincense that ever fumed  
From temple censers swung from pictured roofs,  
Float warmly through the corridors of heaven.

Hiss! moan! shriek! wreath thy livid serpentine  
Volutions, O ye earth-born flames! and flout  
The silent skies with strange fire, like a dawn  
Rubific, terrible, a lurid glare!  
Olympus shrinks beside thee! I, alone,  
Like deity ignipotent, behold  
Thy playful whirls and thy weird melody  
Hear undismayed. O gods! shall I go near  
And in the molten horror headlong plunge  
Deathward, and that serene immortal life  
Discover? Shriek your hellish discord out  
Into the smoky firmament! Down roll  
Your fat bituminous torrents to the sea,  
Hot hissing! Far away in element

Untroubled rise the crystal battlements  
Of the celestial mansion, where to be  
Is my ambition; and O far away  
From this dull earth in azure atmospheres  
My star shall pant its silvery lustre, bright  
With sempiternal radiance, voyaging  
On blissful errands the pure marble air.

O, dominations and life-yielding powers,  
Listen my yearning prayer: To be of ye—  
Of thy grand hierarchy and old race  
Plenipotent, I do a deed that dares  
The draff of men to equal. You have given  
Immortal life to common human men  
Who common deeds achieved; nay, even for love  
Some goddesses voluptuous have raised  
Weak whiners from this curst sublunar world,  
Pillowed them on snow bosoms in the bowers  
Of Paradise! And shall Empedocles,  
Who from the perilous grim edge of life  
Leaps sheer into the liquid fire and meets  
Death like a lover, not be sphered and made  
A virtue ministrant? All you soft orbs  
By pure intelligences piloted,  
Incomprehensibly their glories show  
Approving. *O ye sparkle-moving fires  
Of heaven, now silently above the flare  
Of this red mountain shining, which of you  
Shall be my home?* Into whose stellar glow  
Shall I arrive, bringing delight and life  
And spiritual motion and dim fame?  
Hiss, fiery serpents! Your sweet breathings warm  
My face as I approach ye. Flap wild wings,  
Ye dragons! flaming round this mouth of hell,  
To me the mouth of heaven.

*Empedocles*

The influence of Keats soon decayed, and calmer influences supervened. He began a play on the

*The  
composition  
of "The  
Luggie"*

Shakespearian model. This ambitious effort, however, was soon relinquished for a dearer, sweeter task,—the composition of a pastoral poem descriptive of the scenery surrounding his home. This subject, first suggested to him by a friend who guessed his real power, grew upon him with wondrous force, till the lines welled into perfect speech through very deepness of passion. His whole soul was occupied. The pictures that had troubled his childhood, the running river, the thymy Campsie fells, were now to live again before his spirit; and all the human sweetness and trouble, the beloved faces, the familiar human figures, stirred to the soft music of a flowing river and the distant hum of looms from cottage doors. The result was the poem entitled "The Luggie," which gives its name to the posthumous volume, and which, though it lacked the last humanizing touches of the poet, remains unique in contemporary literature.

*Fame,  
the bubble*

But even while his heart was full of this exquisite utterance, this babble of green fields and silver waters, the influence of cities was growing more and more upon him, and poesy was no more the quite perfect joy that had made his boyhood happy. It was not enough to *sing* now; the thirst for applause was deepening; and it is not therefore extraordinary that even his fresh and truthful pastoral shows here and there the hectic flush of self-consciousness,—the dissatisfied glance in the

direction of the public. The natural result of this was occasional merry-making, and grog-drinking, and beating the big city during the dark hours. There was high poetic pleasure in singing songs among artizans in familiar public-houses, flirting with an occasional milliner, and singing her charms in broad Scotch,—even occasionally coming to fisticuffs in obscure places, possibly owing to a hot discussion on the character of that demon of religious Scotch artizans,—the poet Shelley. I do not hesitate the least in mentioning these matters, because Gray has been too frequently represented as a morbid, unwholesome young gentleman, without natural weaknesses—a kind of aqueous Henry Kirke White, branded faintly with ambition. He was nothing of the kind. He was a young man, as other young men are—foolish and wild in his season, though never gross or disreputable. The very excess of his sensitiveness led him into outbreaks against convention. While pouring out the sweetness of his nature in “The Luggie,” he could turn aside again and again, and relieve his excitement by such doggrel as this, addressed to a companion,—

*“O for ane  
an’ twenty,  
Tam!”*

Let olden Homer, hoary,  
Sing of wondrous deeds of glory,  
In that ever-burning story,  
Bold and bright, friend Bob!  
*Our* theme be Pleasure, careless,  
In all stirring frolics fearless,

In the vineyard, reckless, peerless,  
Heroes dight, friend Bob!

*Gray's  
sweetness of  
disposition*

Be it noted, however, that there was in Gray's nature a strange and exquisite femininity,—a perfect feminine purity and sweetness. Indeed, till the mystery of sex be medically explained, I shall ever believe that nature originally meant David Gray for a female; for besides the strangely sensitive lips and eyes, he had a woman's shape,—narrow shoulders, lissome limbs, and extraordinary breadth across the hips.

*His first  
meeting with  
the writer of  
this Memoir*

Early in his teens David had made the acquaintance of a young man of Glasgow, with whom his fortunes were destined to be intimately woven. That young man was myself. We spent year after year in intimate communion, varying the monotony of our existence by reading books together, plotting great works, writing extravagant letters to men of eminence, and wandering about the country on vagrant freaks. Whole nights and days were often passed in seclusion, in reading the great thinkers, and pondering on their lives. Full of thoughts too deep for utterance, dreaming, David would walk at a swift pace through the crowded streets, with face bent down, and eyes fixed on the ground, taking no heed of the human beings passing to and fro. Then he would come to me crying, "I have had a dream," and would forthwith tell of visionary pictures which had haunted him in



his solitary walk. This "dreaming," as he called it, consumed the greater portion of his hours of leisure.

Towards the end of the year 1859, David became convinced that he could no longer idle away the hours of his youth. His work as student and as pupil-teacher was ended, and he must seek some means of subsistence. He imagined, too, that his poor parents threw dull looks on the beggar of their bounty. Having abandoned all thoughts of entering into the Church, for which neither his taste nor his opinions fitted him, what should he do in order to earn his daily bread? His first thought was to turn schoolmaster; but no! the notion was an odious one. He next endeavoured, without success, to procure himself a situation on one of the Glasgow newspapers. Meantime, while drifting from project to project he maintained a voluminous correspondence, in the hope of persuading some eminent man to read his poem of "The Luggie."

Unfortunately, the persons to whom he wrote were too busy to pay much attention to the solicitations of an entire stranger. Repeated disappointments only increased his self-assertion; the less chance there seemed of an improvement in his position, and the less strangers seemed to recognize his genius, the more dogged grew his conviction that he was destined to be a great poet. His letters were full of this conviction. To one entire stranger

*"By his own  
heart  
inspired"*

*"Men gave  
thee  
nothing"*

*Egoism*

he wrote: "I am a poet; let that be understood distinctly." Again: "I tell you that, if I live, my name and fame shall be second to few of any age; and to none of my own. I speak this because I *feel* power." Again: "I am so accustomed to compare my own mental progress with that of such men as Shakespeare, Goethe, and Wordsworth, that the dream of my life will not be fulfilled, if my fame equal not, at least, that of the latter of these three!" This was extraordinary language, and it is not surprising that little heed was paid to it. Let some explanation be given here. No man could be more humble, reverent-minded, self-doubting, than David was in reality. Indeed, he was constitutionally timid of his own abilities, and he was personally diffident. In his letters only he absolutely endeavoured to wrest from his correspondents some recognition of his claim to help and sympathy. The moment sympathy came, no matter how coldly it might be expressed, he was all humility and gratitude. In this spirit, after one of his wildest flights of self-assertion, he wrote: "When I read Thomson, I despair." Again: "Being bare of all recommendations, I lied with my own conscience, deeming that if I called myself a great man you were bound to believe me." Again: "If you saw me you would wonder if the quiet, bashful, boyish-looking fellow before you was the author of all yon blood and thunder."

*Letter-  
writing:  
Sydney  
Dobell*

In a lengthy correspondence with Mr. Sydney Dobell, who is also known as a writer of verse, David wrote wildly and boldly enough; but he was quite ready to plead guilty to silliness when the fits were over. But the grip of cities was on him, and he was far too conscious of outsiders. How sad and pitiable sounds the following! "Mark!" he cried, "it is not what I have done, or can now do, but what I feel myself able and born to do, that makes me so selfishly stupid. Your sentence, thrown back to me for reconsideration, would certainly seem strange to any one but myself; but the thought that I had so written to you only made me the more resolute in my actions, and the wilder in my visions. What if I sent the same sentence back to you again, with the quiet stern answer, that it is my intention to be the 'first poet of my own age,' and second only to a very few of any age. Would you think me 'mad,' 'drunk,' or an 'idiot,' or my 'self-confidence' one of the '*saddest* paroxysms?' When my biography falls to be written, will not this same self-confidence be one of the most striking features of my intellectual development? Might not a poet of twenty *feel* great things? In all the stories of mental warfare that I have ever read, that mind which became of celestial clearness and godlike power did nothing for twenty years but *feel*." The hand-loom weaver's son raving about his "biography!" The

Self-  
analysis

*How if the  
man outlives  
the poet in  
him?*

youth that could babble so deliciously of green fields looking forward to the day when he would be anatomized by the small critic and chronicled by the chroniclers of small beer! It was not in this mood that he wrote his sweetest lines. The world was already too much with him.

Here, if anywhere in his career, I see signs which console me for his bitter suffering and too early death; signs that, had he lived, his fate might have been an even sadder one. Saint Beuve says, as quoted by Alfred de Musset:—

*Il existe, en un mot, chez les trois quarts des hommes,  
Un poète mort jeune à qui l'homme survit!*

A dead young poet whom the man survives!—and dead through that very poison which David was beginning to taste. I dare not aver that such would have been the result; I dare not say that David's poetic instinct was too weak to survive the danger. But the danger existed—clear, sparkling, deathly. Had David been hurried away to teach schools among the hills, buried among associations pure and green as those that surrounded his youth and childhood, the poetic instinct might have survived and achieved wondrous results. But he went southward,—he imbibed an atmosphere entirely unfitted for his soul at that period; and—perhaps, after all, the gods loved him and knew best.

For all at once there flashed upon David and myself the notion of going to London, and taking the literary fortress by storm. Again and again we talked the project over, and again and again we hesitated. In the spring of 1860, we both found ourselves without an anchorage; each found it necessary to do something for daily bread. For some little time the London scheme had been in abeyance; but, on the 3rd of May, 1860, David came to me, his lips firmly compressed, his eyes full of fire, saying, "Bob, I'm off to London." "Have you funds?" I asked. "Enough for one, not enough for two," was the reply. "If you can get the money anyhow, we'll go together." On parting, we arranged to meet on the evening of the 5th of May, in time to catch the five o'clock train. Unfortunately, however, we neglected to specify which of the two Glasgow stations was intended. At the hour appointed, David left Glasgow by one line of railway, in the belief that I had been unable to join him, but determined to try the venture alone. With the same belief and determination, I left at the same hour by the other line of railway. We arrived in different parts of London at about the same time. Had we left Glasgow in company, or had we met immediately after our arrival in London, the story of David's life might not have been so brief and sorrowful.

*"The Lights  
o' London"*

Though the month was May, the weather was

*Alone in  
the great  
city*

dark, damp, cloudy. On arriving in the metropolis, David wandered about for hours, carpet-bag in hand. The magnitude of the place overwhelmed him; he was lost in that great ocean of life. He thought about Johnson and Savage, and how they wandered through London with pockets more empty than his own; but already he longed to be back in the little carpeted bedroom in the weaver's cottage. How lonely it seemed! Among all that mist of human faces there was not one to smile in welcome; and how was he to make his trembling voice heard above the roar and tumult of those streets? The very policemen seemed to look suspiciously at the stranger. To his sensitively Scottish ear the language spoken seemed quite strange and foreign; it had a painful, homeless sound about it that sank nervously on the heart-strings. As he wandered about the streets he glanced into coffee-shop after coffee-shop, seeing "beds" ticketed in each fly-blown window. His pocket contained a sovereign and a few shillings, but he would need every penny. Would not a bed be useless extravagance? he asked himself. Certainly. Where, then, should he pass the night? In Hyde Park! He had heard so much about this part of London that the name was quite familiar to him. Yes, he would pass the night in the park. Such a proceeding would save money, and be exceedingly romantic; it would be just

the right sort of beginning for a poet's struggle in London! So he strolled into the great park, and wandered about its purlieus till morning. In remarking upon this foolish conduct, one must reflect that David was strong, heartsome, full of healthy youth. It was a frequent boast of his that he scarcely ever had a day's illness. Whether or not his fatal complaint was caught during this his first night in London is uncertain, but some few days afterwards David wrote thus to his father: "By-the-bye, I have had the worst *cold* I ever had in my life. I cannot get it away properly, but I feel a great deal better to-day." Alas! violent cold had settled down upon his lungs, and insidious death was already slowly approaching him. So little conscious was he of his danger, however, that I find him writing to a friend: "What brought me here? God knows, for I don't. *Alone* in such a place is a horrible thing. . . . People don't seem to understand me. . . . Westminster Abbey; I was there all day yesterday. If I live I shall be buried there—so help me God! A completely defined consciousness of *great* poetical genius is my only antidote against utter despair and despicable failure."

*Illness*

I suppose his purposes in coming to Babylon were about as definite as my own had been, although he had the advantage of being qualified as a pupil-teacher. We tossed ourselves on the great waters

*The two  
youthful  
poets*

as two youths who wished to learn to swim, and trusted that by diligent kicking we might escape drowning. There was the prospect of getting into a newspaper office. Again, there was the prospect of selling a few verses. Thirdly, if everything failed, there was the prospect of getting into one of the theatres as supernumeraries.<sup>1</sup> Beyond all this, there was of course the dim prospect that London would at once, and with acclamations, welcome the advent of true genius, albeit with seedy garments and a Scotch accent. It doubtless never occurred to either that besides mere "consciousness" of power, some other things were necessary for a literary struggle in London—special knowledge, capability of interesting oneself in trifles, and the pen of a ready writer. What were David's qualifications for a fight in which hundreds miserably fail year after year? Considerable knowledge of Greek, Latin, and French, great miscellaneous reading, a clerkly handwriting, and a bold purpose. Slender qualifications, doubtless, but while life lasted there was hope.

*Buchanan  
finds Gray  
and they  
lodge  
together*

We did not meet until upwards of a week after our arrival in London, though each had soon been apprised of the other's presence in the city. Finally we came together. David's first impulse was to describe his lodgings, situated in a by-street

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the friends, indeed, unknown to each other, actually applied for such a situation; and one succeeded.



in the Borough. "A cold, cheerless bedroom, Bob; nothing but a blanket to cover me. For God's sake get me out of it!" We were walking side by side in the neighbourhood of the New Cut, looking about us with curious puzzled eyes, and now and then drawing each other's attention to sundry objects of interest. "Have you been well?" I inquired. "First-rate," answered David, looking as merry as possible. Nor did he show any indications whatever of illness; he seemed hopeful, energetic, full of health and spirits; his sole desire was to change his lodging. It was not without qualms that he surveyed the dingy, smoky neighbourhood where I resided. The sun was shedding dismal crimson light on the chimney-pots, and the twilight was slowly thickening. We climbed up three flights of stairs to my bedroom; dingy as it was, this apartment seemed, in David's eyes, quite a palatial sanctum; and it was arranged that we should take up our residence together. As speedily as possible I procured David's little stock of luggage; then, settled face to face as in old times, we made very merry.

My first idea, on questioning David about his prospects, was that my friend had had the best of luck. You see, the picture drawn on either side was a golden one; but the brightness soon melted away. It turned out that David, on arriving in London, had sought out certain gentlemen whom

*A friend in  
need—  
Lord  
Houghton*

*"The  
Luggie"  
refused by  
Thackeray*

he had formerly favoured with his correspondence, among others Mr. Richard Monckton Milnes, now Lord Houghton. Though not a little astonished at the appearance of the boy-poet, Mr. Milnes had received him kindly, assisted him to the best of his power, and made some work for him in the shape of manuscript-copying. The same gentleman had also used his influence with literary people,—to very little purpose, however. The real truth turned out to be that David was disappointed and low-spirited. "It's weary work, Bob; they don't understand me; I wish I was back in Glasgow." It was now that David told me all about that first day and night in London, and how he had already begun a poem about "Hyde Park;" how Mr. Milnes had been good to him, had said that he was "a poet," but had insisted on his going back to Scotland and becoming a minister. David did not at all like the notion of returning home. He thought he had every chance of making his way in London. About this time he was bitterly disappointed by the rejection of "The Luggie" by Mr. Thackeray, to whom Mr. Milnes had sent it, with a recommendation that it should be inserted in the "Cornhill Magazine."

*Lord  
Houghton's  
description  
of Gray*

Lord Houghton briefly and vividly describes his intercourse with the young poet in London. He had written to Gray strongly urging him not to make the hazardous experiment of a literary life,

but to aim after a professional independence. "A few weeks afterwards," he writes, "I was told that a young man wished to see me, and when he came into the room I at once saw that it could be no other than the young Scotch Poet. It was a light, well-built, but somewhat stooping figure, with a countenance that at once brought strongly to my recollection a cast of the face of Shelley in his youth, which I had seen at Mr. Leigh Hunt's. There was the same full brow, out-looking eyes, and sensitive melancholy mouth. He told me at once that he had come to London in consequence of my letter, as from the tone of it he was sure I should befriend him. I was dismayed at this unexpected result of my advice, and could do no more than press him to return home as soon as possible. I painted as darkly as I could the chances and difficulties of a literary struggle in the crowded competition of this great city, and how strong a swimmer it required to be not to sink in such a sea of tumultuous life. 'No, he would not return.' I determined in my own mind that he should do so before I myself left town for the country, but at the same time I believed that he might derive advantage from a short personal experience of hard realities. He had confidence in his own powers, a simple certainty of his own worth, which I saw would keep him in good heart and preserve him from base temptations. He

*His advice  
not taken*

*Recurring  
sickness*

refused to take money, saying he had enough to go on with; but I gave him some light literary work, for which he was very grateful. When he came to me again, I went over some of his verse with him, and I shall not forget the passionate gratification he showed when I told him that, in my judgment, he was an undeniable poet. After this admission he was ready to submit to my criticism or correction, though he was sadly depressed at the rejection of one of his poems, over which he had evidently spent much labour and care, by the editor of a distinguished popular periodical, to whom I had sent it with a hearty recommendation. His, indeed, was not a spirit to be seriously injured by a temporary disappointment; but when he fell ill so soon afterwards, one had something of the feeling of regret that the notorious review of Keats inspires in connection with the premature loss of the author of 'Endymion.' It was only a few weeks after his arrival in London, that the poor boy came to my house apparently under the influence of violent fever. He said he had caught cold in the wet weather, having been insufficiently protected by clothing; but had delayed coming to me for fear of giving me unnecessary trouble. I at once sent him back to his lodgings, which were sufficiently comfortable, and put him under good medical superintendence. It soon became apparent that pulmonary disease had set in, but there

were good hopes of arresting its progress. I visited him often, and every time with increasing interest. He had somehow found out that his lungs were affected, and the image of the destiny of Keats was ever before him."

It has been seen that Mr. Milnes was the first to perceive that the young adventurer was seriously ill. After a hurried call on his patron one day in May, David rejoined me in the near neighbourhood. "Milnes says I'm to go home and keep warm, and he'll send his own doctor to me." This was done. The doctor came, examined David's chest, said very little, and went away, leaving strict orders that the invalid should keep within doors, and take great care of himself. Neither David nor I liked the expression of the doctor's face at all.

It soon became evident that David's illness was of a most serious character. Pulmonary disease had set in; medicine, blistering, all the remedies employed in the early stages of his complaint, seemed of little avail. Just then David read the "Life of John Keats," a book which impressed him with a nervous fear of impending dissolution. He began to be filled with conceits droller than any he had imagined in health. "If I were to meet Keats in heaven," he said one day, "I wonder if I should know his face from his pictures?" Most frequently his talk was of labour uncompleted, hope deferred; and he began to pant for free

*A foregone  
conclusion*

*The  
Life of  
Keats read  
by Gray*

*London  
discomforts*

country air. "If I die," he said on a certain occasion, "I shall have one consolation,—Milnes will write an introduction to the poems." At another time, with tears in his eyes, he repeated Burns's epitaph. Now and then, too, he had his fits of frolic and humour, and would laugh and joke over his unfortunate position. It cannot be said that Mr. Milnes and his friends were at all lukewarm about the case of their young friend; on the contrary, they gave him every practical assistance. Mr. Milnes himself, full of the most delicate sympathy, trudged to and fro between his own house and the invalid's lodging; his pockets laden with jelly and beef-tea, and his tongue tipped with kindly comfort. Had circumstances permitted, he would have taken the invalid into his own house. Unfortunately, however, David was compelled to remain, in company with me, in a chamber which seemed to have been constructed peculiarly for the purpose of making the occupants as uncomfortable as possible. There were draughts everywhere: through the chinks of the door, through the windows, down the chimney, and up through the flooring. When the wind blew, the whole tenement seemed on the point of crumbling to atoms; when the rain fell, the walls exuded moisture; when the sun shone, the sunshine only served to increase the characteristic dinginess of the furniture. Occasional visitors, however,

could not be fully aware of these inconveniences. It was in the night-time, and in bad weather, that they were chiefly felt; and it required a few days' experience to test the superlative discomfort of what David (in a letter written afterwards) styled "the dear old ghastly bankrupt garret." His stay in these quarters was destined to be brief. Gradually, the invalid grew home-sick. Nothing would content him but a speedy return to Scotland. He was carefully sent off by train, and arrived safely in his little cottage-home far north. Here all was unchanged as ever. The beloved river was flowing through the same fields, and the same familiar faces were coming and going on its banks; but the whole meaning of the pastoral pageant had changed, and the colour of all was deepening towards the final sadness.

Great, meanwhile, had been the commotion in the hand-loom weaver's cottage, after the receipt of this bulletin: "I start off to-night at five o'clock by the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway, right on to London, in good health and spirits." A great cry arose in the household. He was fairly "daft"; he was throwing away all his chances in the world; the verse-writing had turned his head. Father and mother mourned together. The former, though incompetent to judge literary merit of any kind, perceived that David was hot-headed, only half-educated, and was going to a place where

*The first  
return  
home*

*"When  
David went  
away"*

thousands of people were starving daily. But the suspense was not to last long. The darling son, the secret hope and pride, came back to the old people, sick to death. All rebuke died away before the pale sad face and the feeble tottering body; and David was welcomed to the cottage hearth with silent prayers.

*The old,  
old story*

It was now placed beyond a doubt that the disease was one of mortal danger; yet David, surrounded again by his old cares, busied himself with many bright and delusive dreams of ultimate recovery. Pictures of a pleasant dreamy convalescence in a foreign clime floated before him morn and night, and the fairest and dearest of the dreams was Italy. Previous to his departure for London he had concocted a wild scheme for visiting Florence, and throwing himself on the poetical sympathy of Robert Browning. He had even thought of enlisting in the English Garibaldian corps, and by that means gaining his cherished wish. "How about Italy?" he wrote to me, after returning home. "Do you still entertain its delusive notions? Pour out your soul before me; I am as a child." All at once a new dream burst upon him. A local doctor insisted that the invalid should be removed to a milder climate, and recommended Natal. In a letter full of coaxing tenderness, David besought me, for the sake of old days, to accompany him thither. I answered



indecisively, but immediately made all endeavours to grant my friend's wish. Meantime I received the following :—

“ Merkland, Kirkintollock,  
“ 10th November, 1860.

*Letter to  
Buchanan*

“EVER DEAR BOB,

“Your letter causes me some uneasiness ; not but that your numerous objections are numerous and vital enough, but they convey the sad and firm intelligence that you cannot come with me. It is absolutely impossible for you to raise a sum sufficient ! Now you know it is not necessary that I should go to Natal ; nay, I have, in very fear, given up the thoughts of it ; but we—or I—could go to Italy or Jamaica—this latter, as I learn, being the more preferable. Nor has there been any ‘ crisis ’ come, as you say. I would cause you much trouble (forgive me for hinting this), but I believe we could be happy as in the dear old times. Dr. — (whose address I don’t know) supposes that I shall be able to work (?) when I reach a more genial climate ; and if that should prove the result, why, it is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But the matter of money bothers me. What I wrote to you was all hypothetical, i. e. things have been carried so far, but I have not heard whether or no the subscription had been gone on with. And, supposing for one instant the utterly preposterous supposition that I had money to carry us

both, then comes the second objection — your dear mother! I am not so far gone, though I fear far enough, to ignore that blessed feeling. But if it were for your good? Before God, if I thought it would in any way harm your health (that cannot be) or your hopes, I would never have mooted the proposal. On the contrary, I feel from my heart it would benefit you; and how much would it not benefit *me*? But I am baking without flour. The cash is not in my hand, and I fear never will be; the amount I would require is not so easily gathered.

Letter to  
Buchanan

“Dobell” is again laid up. He is at the Isle of Wight, at some establishment called the Victoria Baths. I am told that his friends deem his life in constant danger. He asks for your address. I shall send it only to-day; wait until you hear what he has got to say. He would prefer me to go to Brompton Hospital. *I would go anywhere for a change.* If I don’t get money *somehow* or *somewhere* I shall die of *ennui*. A weary desire for change, life, excitement of every, *any* kind,

<sup>1</sup> Sydney Dobell, author of “Balder,” “The Roman,” &c. This gentleman’s kindness to David, whom he never saw, is beyond all praise. Nor was the invalid ungrateful. “Poor, kind, half-immortal spirit here below,” wrote David, alluding to Dobell, “shall I know thee when we meet new-born into eternal existence? . . . Dear friend Bob, did you ever know a nobler? I cannot get him out of my mind. I would write to him daily would it not pest him.”

possesses me, and without *you* what am I? There is no other person in the world whom I could spend a week with, and thoroughly enjoy it. Oh, how I desire to smoke a cigar, and have a pint and a chat with you.

“By the way, how are you getting on? Have you lots to do? and well paid for it? Or is life a lottery with you? and the tea-caddy a vacuum? and—a snare? and—a nightmare? Do you *dream* yet, on your old rickety sofa in the dear old ghastly bankrupt garret at No. 66? Write to yours eternally,

“DAVID GRAY.”

The proposal to go abroad was soon abandoned, partly because the invalid began to evince a nervous home-sickness, but chiefly because it was impossible to raise a sufficient sum of money. Yet be it never said that this youth was denied the extremest loving sympathy and care. As I look back on those days it is to me a glad wonder that so many tender faces, many of them quite strange, clustered round his sick-bed. When it is reflected that he was known only as a poor Scotch lad, that even his extraordinary lyric faculty was as yet only half-guessed, if guessed at all, the kindness of the world through his trouble is extraordinary. Milnes, Dobell, Dobell's lady-friends at Hampstead, tired never in devising plans for the salvation

Going  
abroad  
proposed

*Disagree-  
ment*

of the poor consumptive invalid, — goodness which sprang from the instincts of the heart itself, and not from that intellectual benevolence which invests in kind deeds with a view to a bonus from the Almighty.

The best and tenderest of people, however, cannot always agree; and in this case there was too much discussion and delay. Some recommended the long sea-voyage; one doctor recommended Brompton Hospital; Milnes suggested Torquay in Devonshire. Meantime, Gray, for the most part ignorant of the discussions that were taking place, besought his friends on all hands to come to his assistance. Late in November he addressed the editor of a local newspaper with whom he was personally acquainted, and who had taken interest in his affairs: —

“I write you in a certain commotion of mind, and may speak wrongly. But I write to *you* because I know that it will take much to offend you when no offence is meant; and when the probable offence will proceed from youthful heat and frantic foolishness. It may be impertinent to address you, of whom I know so little, and yet so much; but the severe circumstances *seem* to justify it.

“The medical verdict pronounced upon me is *certain and rapid death if I remain at Merkland*. That is awful enough, even to a brave man. But

there is a chance of escape ; as a drowning man grasps at a straw I strive for it. Good, kind, true Dobell writes me this morning the plans for my welfare which he has put in progress, and which most certainly meet my wishes. They are as follows : Go *immediately*, and *as a guest* to the house of Dr. Lane, in the salubrious town of Richmond ; thence, when the difficult matter of admission is overcome, to the celebrated Brompton Hospital for chest diseases ; and in the Spring to Italy. Of course, all this presupposes the conjectural problem that I will slowly recover. ‘Consummation devoutly to be wished !’ Now, you think, or say, what prevents you from taking advantage of all these plans ? At once, and without any squeamishness, *money for an outfit*. I did not like to ask Dobell, nor do I ask you ; but hearing a ‘subscription’ had been *spoken of*, I urge it with all my weak force. I am not in want of an immense sum, but say £12 or £15. This would conduce to my safety as far as human means could do so. If you can aid me in getting this sum, the obligation to a sinking fellow-creature will be as indelible in his heart as the moral law.

*Catching  
at straws*

“I hope you will not misunderstand me. My barefaced request may be summed thus : If your influence set the affair a-going, quietly and *quickly*, the thing is done, and I am off. Surely I am worth £15 ; and for God’s sake overlook the

*The pity  
of it all*

strangeness and the freedom and the utter impertinence of this communication. I would be off for Richmond in two days, had I the money, and sitting here thinking of the fearful probabilities makes me half-mad."

It was soon found necessary, however, to act with decision. A residence in Kirkintollock throughout the winter was, on all accounts, to be avoided. A lady, therefore, subscribed to the Brompton Hospital for chest complaints for the express purpose of procuring David admission.

*Again the  
lights of  
London  
beckon*

One bleak wintry day, not long after the receipt of the above letter, I was gazing out of my lofty lodging-window when a startling vision presented itself, in the shape of David himself, seated with quite a gay look in an open Hansom cab. In a minute we were side by side, and one of my first impulses was to rebuke David for the folly of exposing himself during such weather, in such a vehicle. This folly, however, was on a parallel with David's general habits of thought. Sometimes, indeed, the poor boy became unusually thoughtful, as when, during his illness, he wrote thus to me: "Are you remembering that you will need clothes? These are things you take no concern about, and so you may be seedy without knowing it. By all means hoard a few pounds if you can (I require none) for *any* emergency like this. Brush your excellent top-coat; it is the best

and warmest I ever had on my back. Mind, you have to pay ready money for a new coat. A seedy man will not get on if he requires, like you, to call personally on his employers."

David had come to London in order to go either to Brompton or to Torquay, — the hospital at which last-named place was thrown open to him by Mr. Milnes. Perceiving his dislike for the Temperance Hotel, to which he had been conducted, I consented that he should stay in the "ghastly bankrupt garret," until he should depart to one or other of the hospitals. It was finally arranged that he should accept a temporary invitation to a hydropathic establishment at Sudbrook Park, Richmond. Thither I at once conveyed him. Meanwhile, his prospects were diligently canvassed by his numerous friends. His own feelings at this time were well expressed in a letter home: "I am dreadfully afraid of Brompton; living among sallow, dolorous, dying consumptives is enough to kill me. Here I am as comfortable as can be: a fire in my room all day, plenty of meat, and good society, — nobody so ill as myself; but there, perhaps, hundreds far worse (the hospital holds 218 in all stages of the disease; ninety of them died last report) dying beside me, perhaps, — it frightens me."

About the same time he sent me the following, containing more particulars: —

Medical  
treatment  
ineffective

"Sudbrook Park, Richmond,  
Surrey.

"MY DEAR BOB,

"Your anxiety will be allayed by learning that I am little worse. The severe hours of this establishment have *not* killed me. At 8 o'clock in the morning a man comes into my bedroom with a pail of cold water, and I must rise and get myself *soused*. This *sousing* takes place three times a day, and I'm not dead *yet*. To-day I told the bathman that I was utterly unable to bear it, and refused to undress. The doctor will hear of it; that's the very thing I want. The society here is most pleasant. No patient so bad as myself. No wonder your father wished to go to the water cure for a month or two; it is the most pleasant, refreshing thing in the world. But *I* am really too weak to bear it. Robert Chambers is here; Mrs. Crowe, the authoress; Lord Brougham's son-in-law; and at dinner and tea the literary tittle-tattle is the most wonderful you ever heard. They seem to know everything about everybody but Tennyson. Major —— (who has a *beautiful* daughter here) was crowned with a laurel-wreath for some burlesque verses he had made and read, last night. Of course you know what I am among them—a pale cadaverous young person, who sits in dark corners, and is for the most part silent; with a horrible fear of being pounced upon by a cultivated unmarried lady, and talked to.



"Seriously, I am not better. When the novelty of my situation is gone, won't the old days at Oakfield Terrace seem pleasant? Why didn't they last for ever?"

"Yours ever,

"DAVID GRAY."

All at once David began, with a delicacy peculiar to him, to consider himself an unwarrantable intruder at Sudbrook Park. In the face of all persuasion, therefore, he joined me in London, whence he shortly afterwards departed for Torquay.

He left me in good spirits, full of pleasant anticipations of Devonshire scenery. But the second day after his departure he addressed to me a wild epistle, dated from one of the Torquay hotels. He had arrived safe and sound, he said, and had been kindly received by a friend of Mr. Milnes. He had at first been delighted with the town, and everything in it. He had gone to the hospital, had been received by "a nurse of death" (as he phrased it), and had been inducted into the privileges of the place; but on seeing his fellow-patients, some in the last stages of disease, he had fainted away. On coming to himself he obtained an interview with the matron. To his request for a private apartment, she had answered that to favour him in that way would be to break written

rules, and that he must content himself with the common privileges of the establishment. On leaving the matron, he had furtively stolen from the place, and made his way through the night to the hotel. From the hotel he addressed the following terrible letter to his parents :—

“Torquay, January 6, 1861.

“DEAR PARENTS,

“I am coming home—home-sick. I cannot stay from home any longer. What’s the good of me being so far from home, and sick and ill? I don’t know whether I’ll be *able* to come back—sleeping none at night—crying out for my mother, and her so far away. Oh God, I wish I were home never to leave it more! Tell everybody that I’m coming back—no better—worse, worse. What’s about climate—about frost or snow or cold weather when one is at home? I wish I had never left it.

“But how am I to get back without money, and my expenses for the journey newly paid yesterday? I came here yesterday scarcely able to walk. O how I wish I saw my father’s face—shall I ever see it? I have no money, and I want to get home, home, home! What shall I do, O God? Father, I shall *steal* to see you again, because I did not use you rightly—my conduct to you all the time I was at home makes me miserable, miserable, miserable! Will you forgive me?—do I ask that?

*Home-sick  
and with a  
breaking  
heart*

forgiven, forgiven, forgiven! If I can't get money to pay for my box, I shall leave box and everything behind. I shall try and be at home by Saturday, January 12th. Mind the day—if I am not home—God knows where I shall be. I have come through things that would make your hearts ache for me—things which I shall never tell to anybody but you, and you shall keep them secret as the grave. Get my own little room ready, quick, quick; have it all tidy and clean and cosy against my home-coming. I wish to die there, and nobody shall nurse me, except my own dear mother, ever, ever again. O home, home, home!

*A final  
appeal to  
his parents*

“I will try and write again, but mind the day. Perhaps my father will come into Glasgow, if I *can* tell him beforehand *how, when, and where* I shall be. I shall try all I can to let him know.

“Mind and tell everybody that I am coming back, because I wish to be back, and cannot stay away. Tell everybody; but I shall come back in the dark, because I am so utterly unhappy. No more, no more. Mind the day.

“Yours,

“D. G.

“Don't answer—not even *think* of answering.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While lingering at Torquay, however, his mood became calmer, and he was able to relieve his over-laden mind in the composition of these lines—deeply interesting, apart from their poetic merit.

*London  
once again*

Before I had time to comprehend the state of affairs, there came a second letter, stating that David was on the point of starting for London. "Every ring at the hotel bell makes me tremble, fancying they are coming to take me away by force. *Had you seen the nurse!* Oh! that I were back again at home—mother! mother! mother!" A few hours after I had read these lines in miser-

#### HOME SICK

*Lines written at Torquay, January, 1861.*

*Home Sick*

Come to me, O my Mother! come to me,  
Thine own son slowly dying far away!  
Thro' the moist ways of the wide ocean, blown  
By great invisible winds, come stately ships  
To this calm bay for quiet anchorage;  
They come, they rest awhile, they go away,  
But, O my Mother, never comest thou!  
The snow is round thy dwelling, the white snow,  
That cold soft revelation pure as light,  
And the pine-spire is mystically fringed,  
Laced with encrusted silver. Here—ah me!—  
The winter is decrepit, underborn,  
A leper with no power but his disease.  
Why am I from thee, Mother, far from thee?  
Far from the frost enchantment, and the woods  
Jewelled from bough to bough? Oh home, my home!  
O river in the valley of my home,  
With mazy-winding motion intricate,  
Twisting thy deathless music underneath  
The polished ice-work—must I nevermore  
Behold thee with familiar eyes, and watch  
Thy beauty changing with the changeful day,  
Thy beauty constant to the constant change?

M.S.

able fear, arrived Gray himself, pale, anxious, and trembling. He flung himself into my arms with a smile of sad relief. "Thank God!" he cried; "*that's* over, and I am here!" Then his cry was for home; he would die if he remained longer adrift; he must depart at once. I persuaded him to wait for a few days, and in the meantime saw some of his influential friends. The skill and regimen of a medical establishment being necessary to him at this stage, it was naturally concluded that he should go to Brompton; but David, in a high state of nervous excitement, scouted the idea. Disease had sapped the foundations of the once strong spirit. He was now bent on returning to the north, and wrote more calmly to his parents from my lodgings:—

"London, Thursday.

"MY VERY DEAR PARENTS,

"Having arrived in London last night, my friends have seized on me again, and wish me to go to Brompton. But what I saw at Torquay was enough, and I will come home, though it should freeze me to death. You must not take literally what I wrote you in my last. I had just *ran away* from Torquay hospital, and didn't know what to do or where to go. But you see I have got to London, and surely by some means or other I shall get home. I am really home-sick. *They all tell me my life is not worth a farthing candle if I go*

Gray's  
letter  
to his  
parents

*to Scotland in this weather, but what about that.* I wish I could tell my father when to come to Glasgow, but I can't. *If* I start to-morrow I shall be in Glasgow very late, and what am I to do if I have no cash. If he comes into Glasgow by the twelve train on Saturday, I may, if possible, see him at the train, but I would not like to say positively. Surely I'll get home somehow. I don't sleep any at night now for coughing and sweating—I am afraid to go to bed. Strongly hoping to be with you soon.

"Yours ever,

"DAVID GRAY."

*Return  
home*

"Home—home—home!" was his hourly cry. To resist these frantic appeals would have been to hasten the end of all. In the midst of winter I saw him into the train at Euston Square. A day afterwards, David was in the bosom of his father's household, never more to pass thence alive. Not long after his arrival at home, he repented his rash flight. "I am not at all contented with my position. I acted like a fool; but if the hospital were the *sine qua non* again, my conduct would be the same." Further, "I lament my own foolish conduct, but what was that quotation about *impel-lunt in Acheron*? It was all nervous impulsion. However, I despair not, and, least of all, my dear fellow, to those whom I have deserted wrongfully."

Ere long, poor David made up his mind that he must die; and this feeling urged him to write something which would keep his memory green for ever. "I am working away at my old poem, Bob; leavening it throughout with the pure beautiful theology of Kingsley." A little later: "By-the-bye, I have about 600 lines of my poem written, but the manual labour is so weakening that I do not go on." Nor was this all. In the very shadow of the grave, he began and finished a series of sonnets on the subject of his own disease and impending death. This increased literary energy was not, as many people imagined, a sign of increased physical strength; it was merely the last flash upon the blackening brand. Gradually, but surely, life was ebbing away from the young poet.

"The  
Luggie"  
resumed

"In the  
Shadows"  
completed

In March, 1861, I formed the plan of visiting Scotland in the spring, and wrote to David accordingly. His delight at the prospect of a fresh meeting—perhaps a farewell one—was as great as mine. He wrote me the following, and burst out into song: '—

Buchanan's  
visit  
proposed

---

I subjoin the poem, not only as lovely in itself, but as the last sad poetic memorial of our love and union. I find it in his printed volume, among the sonnets entitled, "In the Shadows:"—

Now, while the long-delaying ash assumes  
Its delicate April green, and loud and clear

"Merkland, March 12, 1861.

"MY DEAR BOB,

Gray's  
reply

"I am very glad to be able to write you to-day. Rest assured to find a change in your old friend when you come down in April. And do, old fellow, let it be the end of April, when the evenings are cool and fresh, and these east-winds have howled themselves to rest. When I think of what a fair worshipful season is before you, I advise you to remove to a little room at Hampstead, where I only wish too, too much to be with you. Don't forget to come north since you have spoken about it; it has made me very happy. My health is no better,—not having been out of my room since I wrote, and for some time before. The weather here is so bitterly cold and unfavourable, that I have not walked 100 yards for three weeks. I trust your revivifying presence will electrify my weary relaxed limbs and enervated system. The

Thro' the cool, yellow, mellow twilight glooms,  
The thrush's song enchants the captive ear;  
Now, while a shower is pleasant in the falling,  
Stirring the still perfume that shakes around;  
Now that doves mourn, and, from the distance calling,  
The cuckoo answers, with a sovereign sound—  
Come, with thy native heart, O true and tried!  
But leave all books; for what with converse high,  
Flavoured with Attic wit, the time shall glide  
On smoothly, as a river floweth by,  
Or as oh stately pinion, through the gray  
Evening, the culver cuts his liquid way!



mind, you know, has a great effect on the body. Accept the wholesome common place. . . . By-the-way, how about Dobell? Did your mind of itself, or even against itself, recognize through the clothes *a man—a poet?* Young speaks well:—

*I never bowed but to superior worth,  
Nor ever failed in my allegiance there.*

Has he the modesty and make-himself-at-home manner of Milnes?" The remainder of this letter is unfortunately lost.

In April, I saw him for the last time, and heard him speak words which showed the abandonment of hope. "I am dying," said David, leaning back in his arm-chair in the little carpeted bedroom; "I am dying, and I've only two things to regret: that my poem is not published, and that I have not seen Italy." In the endeavour to inspire hope I spoke of the happy past, and of the happy days yet to be. David only shook his head with a sad smile. "It is the old *dream*—only a dream, Bob—but I am content." He spoke of all his friends with tenderness, and of his parents with intense and touching love. Then it was "farewell!" "After all our dreams of the future," he said, "I must leave you to fight alone; but shall there be no more 'cakes and ale' because I die?" I returned to London; and ere long heard that David was eagerly attempting to get "The Luggie" published. Delay after

*The two  
poets meet  
for the last  
time*

*Renewed  
attempts  
to get "The  
Luggie"  
published*

delay occurred. "If my book be not immediately gone on with, I fear I may never see it. Disease presses closely on me. . . . The merit of my MSS. is very little—mere hints of better things—crude notions harshly language; but that must be overlooked. They are left not to the world (wild thought!), but as the simple, possible, sad, only legacy I can leave to those who have loved and love me." To a dear friend and fellow poet, William Freeland, then sub-editor of the *Glasgow Citizen*, he wrote at this time: "I feel more acutely the approach of that mystic dissolution of existence. The body is unable to perform its functions, and like rusty machinery creaks painfully to the final crash. . . . About my poem,—it troubles me like an ever present demon. Some day I'll burn all that I have ever written,—yet no! They are all that remain of *me* as a living soul. Milnes offers £5 towards its publication. I shall have it ready by Saturday first." And to Freeland, who visited him every week, and cheered his latter moments with a true poet's converse, he wrote out a wild dedication, ending in these words: "Before I enter that nebulous uncertain land of shadowy notions and tremulous wonderings—standing on the threshold of the sun and looking back, I cry thee, O beloved! a last farewell, lingeringly, passionately, without tears." At this period I received the following:—

"Merkland, N. S., Sunday Evening.

"DEAR, DEAR BOB,

"By all means and instantly, 'move in this matter' of my book. Do you really and without any dream-work, think it could be gone about *immediately*? If not soon I fear I shall never behold it. *The doctors give me no hope*, and with the yellowing of the leaf 'changes' likewise 'the countenance' of your friend. Freeland is in possession of the MSS., but before I send them (I love them in so great temerity) I would like to see, and, *if at all possible*, revise them. Meanwhile, act and write. Above all, Bob, give me (and my father) no hope unless on sound foundation. Better that the rekindled desire should die than languish, bringing misery. I cannot sufficiently impress on you how important this 'book,' is to me: with what ignoble trembling I anticipate its appearance: how I shall bless you should you succeed.

*The heart-break of it all*

"Do not tempt me with your kindness. The family have almost got over the strait, only my father being out of work. It is, indeed, a 'golden treasury' you have sent me. Many thanks. My only want is new interesting books. I shall return it soon when I get *Smith*. Do not, like a good fellow, disappoint an old friend by forgetting to send *that* work. With what interest (thinking on my own probable volume) shall I examine the print, &c. *I am sure, sure to return it.*

"When *you* complain of physical discomfort I believe. What is the matter? Your letters now are a mere provoking adumbration of your condition. I know positively nothing of you, but that you are mentally and bodily depressed, and that you will never forget Gray. In God's name let us keep together the short time remaining.

"You tell me nothing; write sooner too. Recollect I have no other pleasure. How is your mother? and all? Are your editorial duties oppressive? Is life full of hope and bright faith, *yet, yet?* Tell me, Bob, and tell me quickly.

"What a fair, sad, beautiful dream is *Italy!* Do you still entertain its delusive motions? Pour your soul before me; I am as a child.

"Yours for ever,

"DAVID GRAY."

*Letter to  
Arthur  
Sutherland*

Still later, in an even sweeter spirit, he wrote to an old schoolmate, Arthur Sutherland, with whom he had dreamed many a boyish dream, when they were pupil-teachers together at the Normal school:—

"As my time narrows to a completion, you grow dearer. I think of you daily with quiet tears. I think of the happy, happy days we might have spent together at Maryburgh; but the vision darkens. My crown is laid in the dust for ever. Nameless too! God, how that troubles

me! Had I but written one immortal poem, what a glorious consolation! But this shall be my epitaph if I have a gravestone at all, —

'Twas not a life,  
'Twas but a piece of childhood thrown away.

O dear, dear Sutherland! I wish I could spend two *healthy* months with you; we would make an effort, and do something great. But slowly, insidiously, and I fear fatally, consumption is doing its work, until I shall be only a fair odorous memory (for I have great faith in your affection for me) to you — a sad tale for your old age.

Whom the gods love, die young.

Bless the ancient Greeks for that comfort. If I was not ripe, do you think I would be gathered?

“Work for fame for my sake, dear Sutherland. Who knows but in spiritual being I may send sweet dreams to you — to advise, comfort, and command! who knows? At all events, when I am *mooly*, may you be fresh as the dawn.

“Yours till death, and I trust *hereafter too*,  
“DAVID GRAY.”

At last, chiefly through the agency of the unwearying Dobell, the poem was placed in the hands of the printer. On the 2nd of December, 1861, a specimen-page was sent to the author. David, with the shadow of death even then dark

*A specimen-  
page of  
“The  
Luggie”  
in type  
and seen  
by Gray*

*Death,  
3rd of  
December,  
1861*

upon him, gazed long and lingeringly at the printed page. All the mysterious past—the boyish yearnings, the flash of anticipated fame, the black surroundings of the great city—flitted across his vision like a dream. It was “good news,” he said. The next day the complete silence passed over the weaver’s household, for David Gray was no more. Thus, on the 3rd of December, 1861, in the twenty-fourth year of his age, he passed tranquilly away, almost his last words being, “God has love, and I have faith.” The following epitaph, written out carefully, a few months before his decease, was found among his papers:—

#### MY EPITAPH

Below lies one whose name was traced in sand —  
He died, not knowing what it was to live :  
Died while the first sweet consciousness of manhood  
And maiden thought electrified his soul :  
Faint beatings in the calyx of the rose.  
Bewildered reader, pass without a sigh  
In a proud sorrow ! There is life with God,  
In other kingdom of a sweeter air ;  
In Eden every flower is blown. Amen.

DAVID GRAY.

*Sept. 27, 1861.*

*“To thy  
dark  
chamber,  
mother  
Earth”*

Draw a veil over the woe that day in the weaver’s cottage, the wild broodings over the beloved face, white in the sweetness of rest after pain. A few days later, the beloved dust was shut for ever from the light, and carried a short journey, in

ancient Scottish fashion, on hand-spokes, to the Auld Aisle Burial-Ground, a dull and lonely square upon an eminence, bounden by a stone wall, and deep with "the uncut hair of graves." Here, in happier seasons, had David often mused; for here slept dust of kindred, and hither in his sight the thin black line of rude mourners often wended with new burdens. Very early, too, he blended the place with his poetic dreams, and spoke of it in a sonnet not to be found in his little printed volume :—

#### OLD AISLE

Aisle of the dead ! your lonely bell-less tower  
 Seems like a soul-less body, whence rebounds  
 No tones ear-sweetening, as if 'twere to embower  
 The Sabbath tresses with its soothing sounds.  
 In pity, crumbling aisle, thou lookest o'er  
 Your former sainted worshippers, whose bones  
 Lie mould'ring 'neath these nettle-girded stones  
 Or 'neath yon rank grave weeds ! Now from afar  
 Is seen the sacred heavenward spire, which seems  
 An intercessor for the mounds below :  
 And doth it not speak eloquent in dreams ?  
 In dreams of aged pastors who did go  
 Up to the hallowed mount with homely tread :  
 While there, old men and simple maids and youths  
 Throng lovingly to hear the sacred truths  
 In gentle stream poured forth. But, he is dead ;  
 And in this hill of sighs he rests unknown,  
 As that wild flower that by his grave hath blown.

*Old Aisle*

Standing on this eminence, one can gaze round upon the scenes which it is no exaggeration to say David has immortalized in song,—the Luggie

*Monument  
to Gray's  
memory  
erected*

flowing, the green woods of Gartshore, the smoke curling from the little hamlet of Merkland, and the faint blue misty distance of the Campsie Fells. The place though a lonely is a gentle and happy one, fit for a poet's rest; and there, while he was sleeping sound, a quiet company gathered ere long to uncover a monument inscribed with his name. The dying voice had been heard. Over the grave now stands a plain obelisk, publicly subscribed for, and inscribed with this epitaph, written by Lord Houghton:—

THIS MONUMENT OF  
AFFECTION, ADMIRATION, AND REGRET,  
IS ERECTED TO  
DAVID GRAY,  
THE POET OF MERKLAND,  
BY FRIENDS FAR AND NEAR,  
DESIROUS THAT HIS GRAVE SHOULD BE REMEMBERED  
AMID THE SCENES OF HIS RARE GENIUS  
AND EARLY DEATH,  
AND BY THE LUGGIE NOW NUMBERED WITH THE STREAMS  
ILLUSTRIOUS IN SCOTTISH SONG.  
BORN, 29TH JANUARY, 1838; DIED, 3RD DECEMBER, 1861.

Here all is said that should be said; yet perhaps the poet's own sweet epitaph, evidently prepared with a view to such a use, would have been more graceful and appropriate.



“Whom the gods love die young,” is no mere pagan consolation ; it has a tenderness for all forms of faith, and even when philosophically translated, as by Wordsworth, who said sweetly that “the good die first,” it still possesses balm for hearts that ache over the departed. That the young soul passes away in its strength, in its prismatic dawn, with many powers undeveloped, yet no power wasted, is the beauty and the pity of the thought, the inference of the apotheosis. The impulse has been upward, and the gods have consecrated the endeavour. The thought hovers over the deathbeds of Keats and Robert Nicoll ; it is repeated even by weary old men over those poets’ graves. No hope has been disappointed, no eye has seen the strong wing grow feeble and falter earthward, and the possibility of a future beyond our seeing is boundless as the aspiration of the spirit which escaped us. “Whom the gods love die young,” said the Athenians ; and “bless the ancient Greeks for *that* comfort,” wrote David, with the thin, tremulous, consumption-wasted hand. Beautiful, pathetically beautiful, is the halo surrounding the head of a young poet as he dies. We scarcely mourn him, — our souls are so stirred towards the eternal. But what comfort may abide when, from the frame that still breathes, poesy arises like an exhalation, and the man lives on. In life as well as in death there is a Plutonian house of exiles,

*Quem  
Di diligunt  
adolescens  
moritur*

and they abandon all hope who enter therein ; and that man inhabits the same. How often does this horror encounter us in our daily paths? The change is rapid and imperceptible. Without hope, without peace, without one glimpse of the glory the young find in their own aspirations, the doomed one buffets and groans in the dark. Which of the gods may he call to his aid? None ; for he believes in none. Better for him, a thousand times better, that he slept unknown in the shadow of the village where he was born. The strong hard scholar, the energetic literary man of business has a shield against the demons of disappointment, but men like David have no such shield. Picture the dark weary struggle for bread which must have been his lot had he lived. He had not the power to write to order, to sell his wits for money. He sleeps in peace. He has taken his unchanged belief in things beautiful to the very fountain-head of all beauty, and will never know the weary strife, the poignant heartache of the unsuccessful endeavourers.

*The effects  
of Gray's  
poetry  
upon his  
father*

The book of poems written, and the writer laid quietly down in the auld aisle burying ground, had David Gray wholly done with earth? No ; for he worked from the grave on one who loved him with a love transcending that of woman. In the weaver's cottage at Merkland subsisted tender sorrow and affectionate remembrance ; but some-

thing more. The shadow lay in the cottage; a light had departed which would never again be seen on sea or land; and David Gray, the handloom weaver, the father of the poet, felt that the meaning had departed out of his simple life. There was a great mystery. The world called his darling son a poet,—and he hardly knew what a poet was; all he *did* know was that the coming of this prodigy had given a new complexion to all the facts of existence. There was a dream-life, it appeared, beyond the work in the fields and the loom. His son, whom he had thought mad at first, was crowned and honoured for the very things which his parents had thought useless. Around him, vague, incomprehensible, floated a new atmosphere, which clever people called *poetry*; and he began to feel that it was beautiful—the more so, that it was so new and wondrous. The fountains of his nature were stirred. He sat and smoked before the fire o' nights, and found himself dreaming too! He was conscious, now, that the glory of his days was beyond that grave in the kirkyard. He was like one that walks in a mist, his eyes full of tears. But he said little of his griefs,—little, that is to say, in the way of direct complaint. “We feel very weary now David has gone!” was all the plaint I knew him to utter; he grieved so silently, wondered so speechlessly. The new life, brief and fatal, made him wise. With

“The vision  
splendid”  
reveals  
itself to  
him

*Home life  
after  
David's  
death*

the eager sensitiveness of the poet himself he read the various criticisms on David's book; and so subtle was the change in him, that, though he was utterly unlearned and had hitherto had no insight whatever into the nature of poetry, he knew by instinct whether the critics were right or wrong, and felt their suggestions to the very roots of his being.

With this old man, in whom I recognized a greatness and sweetness of soul that has broadened my view of God's humblest creatures ever since, I kept up a correspondence—at first for David's sake, but latterly for my correspondent's own sake. His letters, brief and simple as they were, grew fraught with delicate and delicious meaning; I could see how he marvelled at the mysterious light he understood not, yet how fearlessly he kept his soul stirred towards the eternal silence where his son was lying. "We feel very weary now David has gone!" Ah, how weary! The long years of toil told their tale now; the thread was snapt, and labour was no longer a perfect end to the soul and satisfaction to the body. The little carpeted bedroom was a prayer-place now. The Luggie flowing, the green woods, the thymy hills, had become haunted; a voice unheard by other dwellers in the valley was calling, calling, and a hand was beckoning; and tired, more tired, dazzled, more dazzled, grew the old weaver. The very *names* of familiar scenes were now a strange trouble;

for were not these names echoing in David's songs? Merkland, "the summer woods of dear Gartshire," the "fairy glen of Wooilee," Criftin, "with his host of gloomy pine-trees," all had their ghostly voices. Strange rhymes mingled with the humming of the loom. Mysterious "poetry," which he had once scorned as an idle thing, deepened and deepened in its fascination for him. All he saw and heard meant something strange in rhyme. He was drawn along by music, and he could not rest.

Beside him dwelt the mother. Her face was quite calm. She had wept bitterly, but her heart now was with other sons and daughters. David was with God, and the minister said that God was good—that was quite enough. None of the new light had troubled her eyes. She knew that her beloved had made a "heap o' rhyme,"—that was all. A good loving lad had gone to rest, but there were still bairns left, bless God!

But the old man lingered on, with hunger in his heart, wonder in his soul. This could not last for ever. In the winter of 1864, he warned me that he was growing ill; and although he attributed his illness to cold, his letters showed me the truth. There was some physical malady, but the aggravating cause was mental. It was my duty, however, to do all that could be done humanly to save him; and the first thing to do was to see that he had those comforts which sick men need. I placed

*Gray's  
Mother*

*Illness of  
the father*

*Attempts  
to assist him  
frustrated*

his case before Lord Houghton; but generous as that man is, all men are not so generous. "It is exceedingly difficult to get people to assist a man of genius himself," wrote Lord Houghton, gloomily; "they won't assist his relations." Lord Houghton, however, personally assisted him, and was joined by a kind colleague, Mr. Baillie Cochrane.

I felt then, and I feel now, that the condition of the old man was even more deeply affecting than the condition of David in his last moments, as deserving of sympathy, as universal in its appeal to human generosity; and I felt a yearning, moreover, to provide for the comfort of David's mother, and for the education of David's brothers. Who knew but that, among the latter, might be another bright intellect, which a little schooling might save for the world? After puzzling myself for a plan, I at last thought that I could attain all my wishes by publishing a book to be entitled "Memorials of David Gray," and to contain contributions from all the writers of eminence whom I could enlist in the good cause. Such a thing would *sell*, and might, moreover, be worth buying. The fine natures were not slow in responding to the appeal, and I mention some names, that they may gain honour. Tennyson promised a poem; Browning another; George Eliot agreed to contribute; Dickens, because he was too busy to write anything more, offered me an equivalent in money. All seemed

well, when one or two objections were raised on the score of propriety; and it was even suggested, that "it looked like begging for the father on the strength of Gray's reputation." Confused and perplexed, I determined to refer the matter to one whose good sense is as great as his heart, but (luckily for his friends) a great deal harder. "Should I or should I not, under the circumstances, go on with my scheme?" His answer being in the negative, the book was not gone on with, and the matter dropped.

Meantime the old man was getting worse. On the 27th April I received this letter:—

"Merkland.

"DEAR MR. BUCHANAN,

"We hope this will find you and Mrs. Buchanan in good health. I am not getting any better. The cough still continues. However, I rise every day a while, but it is only to sit by the fire. Weather is so cold I cannot go out, except sometimes I get out and walks round yard. *I am not looking for betterness.* I have nothing particular to say, only we thought you would be thinking us ungrateful in not writing soon.

"I remain, yours ever, •

"DAVID GRAY.

"I understand there is some movement with David's stone<sup>1</sup> again."

<sup>1</sup> The monument, not then erected.

Letter to  
Buchanan

*Death of  
Gray's  
father  
in May,  
1862*

On the 9th May, he wrote, "I have Dr. Stewart to attend me. He called on Sunday and sounded me ;— he says I am a dying man, and dying fast. You cannot imagine what a weak person I am ; I am nearly bedfast." On the 16th May came the last lines I ever received from him. They are almost illegible, and their purport prevents me from printing them here. A few days more, and the old man was dead. His green grave lies in the shadow of the obelisk which stands over his beloved son. Father and child are side by side. A little cloud, a pathetic mystery, came between them in life ; but that is all over. The old handloom weaver, who never wrote a verse, unconsciously reached his son's stature some time ere he passed away. The mysterious thing called "poetry," which operated such changes in his simple life, became all clear at last—in that final moment when the world's meanings become transparent, and nothing is left but to swoon back with closed eyes into the darkness, confiding in God's mercy, content either to waken at His footstool, or to rest painlessly for evermore.





POET ANDREW

*Sing, Poet, small or mighty—hug to thyself  
The luxury of seeing—sing, and die!  
'Tis the old story of the figleaf time:  
A groping after beauty, a divine,  
Aspiring, climbing, impulse, after God;—  
Something far better than successful too—  
Eternal!*



## POET ANDREW

*O Loom, that loud art murmuring,  
What doth he hear thee say or sing?  
Thou hummest o'er the dead one's songs,  
He cannot choose but hark,  
His heart with tearful rapture throngs,  
But all his face grows dark.*

*O cottage Fire, that burnest bright,  
What pictures sees he in thy light?  
A city's smoke, a white white face,  
Phantoms that fade and die,  
And last, the lonely burial-place  
On the windy hill hard by.*

**T**IS near a year since Andrew went to sleep—

A winter and a summer. Yonder bed  
Is where the boy was born, and where  
he died,

And yonder o'er the lowland is his grave:  
The nook of grass and gowans where in thought  
I found you standing at the set o' sun . . .  
The Lord content us—'tis a weary world.

These five-and-twenty years I've wrought and  
wrought

In this same dwelling ;—hearken ! you can hear  
The looms that whuzzle-whazzle ben the house,  
Where Jean and Mysie, lassies in their teens,  
And Jamie, and a neighbour's son beside,  
Work late and early. Andrew who is dead  
Was our first-born ; and when he crying came,  
With beaded een and pale old-farrant face,  
Out of the darkness, Mysie and mysel'  
Were young and heartsome ; and his smile, be sure,  
Made daily toil the sweeter. Hey, his kiss  
Put honey in the very porridge-pot !  
His smile strung threads of sunshine on the loom !  
And when he hung around his mother's neck,  
He decked her out in jewels and in gold  
That even ladies envied ! . . . Weel ! . . . in time  
Came other children, newer gems and gold,  
And Andrew quitted Mysie's breast for mine.  
So years rolled on, like bobbins on a loom ;  
And Mysie and mysel' had work to do,  
And Andrew took his turn among the rest,  
No sweeter, dearer ; till, one Sabbath day,  
When Andrew was a curly-pated tot  
Of sunny summers six, I had a crack  
With Miler Mucklewraith the Minister,  
Who put his kindly hand on Andrew's head,  
Called him a clever wean, a bonnie wean,  
Clever at learning, while the mannikin  
Blushed red as any rose, and peeping up  
Went twinkle-twinkle with his round black een ;

And then, while Andrew laughed and ran awa',  
The Minister went deeper in his praise,  
And prophesied he would become in time  
A man of mark. This set me thinking, sir,  
And watching, — and the mannock puzzled me.

Would sit for hours upon a stool and draw  
Droll faces on the slate, while other lads  
Were shouting at their play; dumbly would lie  
Beside the Lintock, sailing, piloting,  
Navies of docken-leaves a summer day;  
Had learn'd the hymns of Doctor Watts by heart,  
And as for old Scots songs, could lilt them a' —  
From Yarrow Braes to Bonnie Bessie Lee —  
And where he learn'd them, only Heaven knew;  
And oft, although he feared to sleep his lane,  
Would cower at the threshold in a storm  
To watch the lightning, — as a birdie sits,  
With fluttering fearsome heart and dripping wings,  
Among the branches. Once, I mind it weel,  
In came he, running, with a bloody nose,  
Part tears, part pleasure, to his fluttering heart  
Holding a callow mavis golden-billed,  
The thin white film of death across its een,  
And told us, sobbing, how a neighbour's son  
Harried the birdie's nest, and how by chance  
He came upon the thief beside the burn  
Throwing the birdies in to see them swim,  
And how he fought him, till he yielded up

This one, the one remaining of the nest ; —  
And “ O the birdie’s dying ! ” sobbed he sore,  
“ The bonnie birdie’s dying ! ” — till it died ;  
And Andrew dug a grave behind the house,  
Buried his dead, and covered it with earth,  
And cut, to mark the grave, a grassy turf  
Where blew a bunch of gowans. After that,  
I thought and thought, and thick as bees the  
thoughts

Buzzed to the whuzzle-whazzling of the loom —  
I could make naething of the mannikin !  
But by-and-by, when Hope was making hay,  
And web-work rose, I settled it and said  
To the good wife, “ ’Tis plain that yonder lad  
Will never take to weaving — and at school  
They say he beats the rest at all his tasks  
Save figures only : I have settled it :  
Andrew shall be a minister — a pride  
And comfort to us, Mysie, in our age ;  
He shall to college in a year or twa  
(If fortune smiles as now) at Edinglass.”  
You guessed the wife opened her een, cried  
“ Foosh ! ”

And called the plan a silly senseless dream,  
A hopeless, useless castle in the air ;  
But ere the night was out, I talked her o’er,  
And here she sat, her hands upon her knees,  
Glow’ring and heark’ning, as I conjured up,  
Amid the fog and reek of Edinglass,

Life's peaceful gloaming and a godly fame.  
So it was broached, and after many cracks  
With Mister Mucklewraith, we planned it a',  
And day by day we laid a penny by  
To give the lad when he should quit the bield.

And years wore on ; and year on year was  
cheered  
By thoughts of Andrew, drest in decent black,  
Throned in a Pulpit, preaching out the Word,  
A house his own, and all the country-side  
To touch their bonnets to him. Weel, the lad  
Grew up among us, and at seventeen  
His hands were genty white, and he was tall,  
And slim, and narrow-shouldered ; pale of face,  
Silent, and bashful. Then we first began  
To feel how muckle more he knew than we,  
To eye his knowledge in a kind of fear,  
As folk might look upon a crouching beast,  
Bonnie, but like enough to rise and bite.  
Up came the cloud between us silly folk  
And the young lad that sat among his Books  
Amid the silence of the night ; and oft  
It pained us sore to fancy he would learn  
Enough to make him look with shame and scorn  
On this old dwelling. 'Twas his *manner*, sir !  
He seldom lookt his father in the face,  
And when he walkt about the dwelling, seemed  
Like one superior ; dumbly he would steal

To the burnside, or into Lintlin Woods,  
With some new-farrant book,—and when I  
    peeped,  
Behold a book of jingling-jangling rhyme,  
Fine-written nothings on a printed page;  
And, pressed between the leaves, a flower  
    perchance  
Anemone or blue Forget-me-not,  
Pluckt in the grassy woodland. Then I peeped  
Into his drawer, among his papers there,  
And found—you guess?—a heap of idle rhymes,  
Big-sounding, like the worthless printed book:  
Some in old copies scribbled, some on scraps  
Of writing-paper, others finely writ  
With spirls and flourishes on big white sheets.  
I clenched my teeth, and groaned. The  
    beauteous dream  
Of the good Preacher in his braw black dress,  
With house and income snug, began to fade  
Before the picture of a drunken loon  
Bawling out songs beneath the moon and stars,—  
Of poet Willie Clay, who wrote a book  
About King Robert Bruce, and aye got fu',  
And scattered stars in verse, and aye got fu',  
Wept the world's sins, and then got fu' again,—  
Of Ferguson, the feckless limb o' law,—  
And Robin Burns, who gauged the whiskey-casks  
And brake the seventh commandment. So at once  
I up and said to Andrew, "You're a fool!



You waste your time in silly senseless verse,  
Lame as your own conceit: take heed! take heed!  
Or, like your betters, come to grief ere long!"  
But Andrew flusht and never spake a word,  
Yet eyed me sidelong with his beaded een,  
And turned awa', and, as he turned, his look —  
Half scorn, half sorrow — stang me. After that,  
I felt he never heeded word of ours,  
And though we tried to teach him common-sense  
He idled as he pleased; and many a year,  
After I spake him first, that look of his  
Came dark between us, and I held my tongue,  
And felt he scorned me for the poetry's sake.  
This coldness grew and grew, until at last  
We sat whole nights before the fire and spoke  
No word to one another. One fine day,  
Says Mister Mucklewraith to me, says he,  
"So! you've a Poet in your house!" and smiled;  
"A Poet? God forbid!" I cried; and then  
It all came out: how Andrew slyly sent  
Verse to the paper; how they printed it  
In Poets' Corner; how the printed verse  
Had ca't a girdle in the callant's head;  
How Mistress Mucklewraith they thought half daft  
Had cut the verses out and pasted them  
In albums, and had praised them to her friends.  
I said but little; for my schemes and dreams  
Were tumbling down like castles in the air,  
And all my heart seemed hardening to stone.

But after that, in secret stealth, I bought  
The papers, hunted out the printed verse,  
And read it like a thief; thought some were good,  
And others foolish havers, and in most  
Saw naething, neither common-sense nor sound—  
Words pottle-bellied, meaningless, and strange,  
That strutted up and down the printed page,  
Like Bailies made to bluster and look big.

’Twas useless grumbling. All my silent looks  
Were lost, all Mysie’s flyting fell on ears  
Choke-full of other counsel; but we talked  
In bed o’ nights, and Mysie wept, and I  
Felt stubborn, wrathful, wronged. It was to be!  
But mind you, though we mourned, we ne’er forsook  
The college scheme. Our sorrow, as we saw  
Our Andrew growing cold to homely ways,  
And scornful of the bield, but strengthened more  
Our wholesome wish to educate the lad,  
And do our duty by him, and help him on  
With our rough hands—the Lord would do the  
rest,  
The Lord would mend or mar him. So at last,  
New-clad from top to toe in home-spun cloth,  
With books and linen in a muckle trunk,  
He went his way to college; and we sat,  
Mysie and me, in weary darkness here;  
For though the younger bairns were still about,  
It seemed our hearts had gone to Edinglass

With Andrew, and were choking in the reek  
Of Edinglass town.

It was a gruesome fight,  
Both for oursel's at home, and for the boy,  
That student life at college. Hard it was  
To scrape the fees together, but beside,  
The lad was young and needed meat and drink.  
We sent him meal and bannocks by the train,  
And country cheeses; and with this and that,  
Though sorely pushed, he throve, though now  
and then

With empty wame: spinning the siller out  
By teaching grammar in a school at night.  
Whiles he came home: weary old-farrant face  
Pale from the midnight candle; bring home  
Good news of college. Then we shook awa'  
The old sad load, began to build again  
Our airy castles, and were hopeful Time  
Would heal our wounds. But, sir, they plagued  
me still —

Some of his ways! When here, he spent his time  
In yonder chamber, or about the woods,  
And by the waterside,— and with him books  
Of poetry, as of old. Mysel' could get  
But little of his company or tongue;  
And when we talkt, atweel, a kind of frost,—  
My consciousness of silly ignorance,  
And worse, my knowledge that the lad himsel'

Felt sorely, keenly, all my ignorant shame,  
Made talk a torture out of which we crept  
With burning faces. Could you understand  
One who was wild as if he found a mine  
Of golden guineas, when he noticed first  
The soft green streaks in a snowdrop's inner  
leaves?

And once again, the moonlight glimmering  
Through watery transparent stalks of flax?  
A flower's a flower! . . . But Andrew snooved  
about,

Aye finding wonders, mighty mysteries,  
In things that ilka learless cottar kenned.  
Now, 'twas the falling snow or murmuring rain;  
Now, 'twas the laverock singing in the sun,  
And dropping slowly to the callow young;  
Now, an old tune he heard his mother lilt;  
And aye those trifles made his pallid face  
Flush brighter, and his een flash keener far,  
Than when he heard of yonder storm in France,  
Or a King's death, or, if the like had been,  
A city's downfall.

He was born with love  
For things both great and small; yet seemed to  
prize  
The small things best. To me, it seemed indeed  
The callant cared for nothing for itself,  
But for some special quality it had

To set him thinking, thinking, or bestow  
A tearful sense he took for luxury.  
He loved us in his silent fashion weel ;  
But in our feckless ignorance we knew  
’Twas when the humour seized him — with a sense  
Of some queer power we had to waken up  
The poetry — ay, and help him in his rhyme !  
A kind of patronising tenderness,  
A pitying pleasure in our Scottish speech  
And homely ways, a love that made him note  
Both ways and speech with the same curious joy  
As filled him when he watched the birds and flowers.

He was as sore a puzzle to us then  
As he had been before. It puzzled us,  
How a big lad, down-cheeked, almost a man,  
Could pass his time in silly childish joys . . .  
Until at last, a hasty letter came  
From Andrew, telling he had broke awa’  
From college, packed his things, and taken train  
To London city, where he hoped (he said)  
To make both fortune and a noble fame  
Through a grand poem, carried in his trunk ;  
How, after struggling on with bitter heart,  
He could no longer bear to fight his way  
Among the common scholars ; and the end  
Bade us be hopeful, trusting God, and sure  
The light of this old home would guide him still  
Amid the reek of evil.

Sae it was !

We twa were less amazed than you may guess,  
Though we had hoped, and feared, and hoped,  
sae long !

But it was hard to bear — hard, hard, to bear !  
Our castle in the clouds was gone for good ;  
And as for Andrew — other lads had ta'en  
The same mad path, and learned the bitter task  
Of poortith, cold, and tears. She grat. I sat  
In silence, looking on the fuffing fire,  
Where streets and ghaistly faces came and went,  
And London city crumbled down to crush  
Our Andrew ; and my heart was sick and cold.  
Ere long, the news across the country-side  
Speak quickly, like the crowing of a cock  
From farm to farm — the women talkt it o'er  
On doorsteps, o'er the garden rails ; the men  
Got fu' upon it at the public-house,  
And whispered it among the fields at work.  
A cry was quickly raised from house to house,  
That all the blame was mine, and cankered een  
Lookt cold upon me, as upon a kind  
Of upstart. “ Fie on pride ! ” the whisper said,  
The fault was Andrew's less than those who taught  
His heart to look in scorn on honest work, —  
Shame on them ! — but the lad, poor lad, would  
learn !

O sir, the thought of this spoiled many a web  
In yonder — tingling, tingling, in my ears,

Until I fairly threw my gloom aside,  
Smiled like a man whose heart is light and young,  
And with a future-kenning happy look  
Threw up my chin, and bade them wait and see . . .  
But, night by night, these een lookt London ways,  
And saw my laddie wandering all alone  
'Mid darkness, fog, and reek, growing afar  
To dark proportions and gigantic shape—  
Just as a figure of a sheep-herd looms,  
Awful and silent, through a mountain mist.

Ye aiblins ken the rest. At first, there came  
Proud letters, swiftly writ, telling how folk  
Now roundly called him "Poet," holding out  
Bright pictures, which we smiled at wearily—  
As people smile at pictures in a book,  
Untrue but bonnie. Then the letters ceased,  
There came a silence cold and still as frost,—  
We sat and hearkened to our beating hearts,  
And prayed as we had never prayed before.  
Then lastly, on the silence broke the news  
That Andrew, far awa', was sick to death,  
And, weary, weary of the noisy streets,  
With aching head and weary hopeless heart,  
Was coming home from mist and fog and noise  
To grassy lowlands and the caller air.

'Twas strange, 'twas strange!—but this, the  
weary end

Of all our bonnie biggins in the clouds,  
Came like a tearful comfort. Love sprang up  
Out of the ashes of the household fire,  
Where Hope was fluttering like the loose white  
film ;  
And Andrew, our own boy, seemed nearer now  
To this old dwelling an our aching hearts  
Than he had ever been since he became  
Wise with book-learning. With an eager pain,  
I met him at the train and brought him home ;  
And when we met that sunny day in hairst,  
The ice that long had sundered us had thawed,  
We met in silence, and our een were dim.  
Och, I can see that look of his this night !  
Part pain, part tenderness — a weary look  
Yearning for comfort such as God the Lord  
Puts into parents' een. I brought him here.  
Gently we set him here beside the fire,  
And spake few words, and hushed the noisy house ;  
Then eyed his hollow cheeks and lustrous een,  
His clammy hueless brow and faded hands,  
Blue veined and white like lily-flowers. The wife  
Forgot the sickness of his face, and moved  
With light and happy footstep but and ben,  
As though she welcomed to a merry feast  
A happy guest. In time, out came the truth :  
Andrew was dying : in his lungs the dust  
Of cities stole unseen, and hot as fire  
Burnt—like a deil's red een that gazed at Death.



Too late for doctor's skill, though doctor's skill  
We had in plenty ; but the ill had ta'en  
Too sure a grip. Andrew was dying, dying :  
The beauteous dream had melted like a mist  
The sunlight feeds on : a' remaining now  
Was Andrew, bare and barren of his pride,  
Stark of conceit, a weel-belovèd child,  
Helpless to help himsel', and dearer thus,  
As when his yaumer<sup>1</sup>—like the corn-craik's cry  
Heard in a field of wheat at dead o' night—  
Break on the hearkening darkness of the bield.

And as he nearer grew to God the Lord,  
Nearer and dearer ilka day he grew  
To Mysie and mysel'—our own to love,  
The world's no longer. For the first last time,  
We twa, the lad and I, could sit and crack  
With open hearts—free-spoken, at our ease ;  
I seemed to know as muckle then as he,  
Because I was sae sad.

Thus grief, sae deep  
It flowed without a murmur, brought the balm  
Which blunts the edge of worldly sense and makes  
Old people weans again. In this sad time,  
We never troubled at his childish ways ;  
We seemed to share his pleasure when he sat

---

<sup>1</sup> *Yaumer*, a child's cry.

List'ning to birds upon the eaves ; we felt  
Small wonder when we found him weeping o'er  
His old torn books of pencilled thoughts and verse ;  
And if, outbye, I saw a bonnie flower,  
I pluckt it carefully and bore it home  
To my sick boy. To me, it somehow seemed  
His care for lovely earthly things had changed—  
Changed from the curious love it once had been,  
Grown larger, bigger, holier, peacefuller ;  
And though he never lost the luxury  
Of loving beauteous things for poetry's sake,  
His heart was God the Lord's, and he was calm.  
Death came to lengthen out his solemn thoughts  
Like shadows to the sunset. So no more  
We wondered. What is folly in a lad  
Healthy and heartsome, one with work to do,  
Befits the freedom of a dying man . . .  
Mother, who chided loud the idle lad  
Of old, now sat her sadly by his side,  
And read from out the Bible soft and low,  
Or lilted lowly, keeking in his face,  
The old Scots songs that made his een so dim.  
I went about my daily work as one  
Who waits to hear a knocking at the door,  
Ere Death creeps in and shadows those that watch ;  
And seated here at e'en i' the ingleside,  
I watched the pictures in the fire and smoked  
My pipe in silence ; for my head was fu'  
Of many rhymes the lad had made of old

(Rhymes I had read in secret, as I said),  
No one of which I minded till they came  
Unsummoned, murmuring about my ears  
Like bees among the leaves.

The end drew near.

Came Winter moaning, and the Doctor said  
That Andrew couldna live to see the Spring;  
And day by day, while frost was hard at work,  
The lad grew weaker, paler, and the blood  
Came redder from the lung. · One Sabbath day—  
The last of winter, for the caller air  
Was drawing sweetness from the barks of trees—  
When down the lane, I saw to my surprise  
A snowdrop blooming underneath a birk,  
And gladly pluckt the flower to carry home  
To Andrew. Ere I reached the bield, the air  
Was thick wi' snow, and ben in yonder room  
I found him, Mysie seated at his side,  
Drawn to the window in the old arm-chair,  
Gazing wi' lustrous een and sickly cheek  
Out on the shower, that wavered softly down  
In glistening siller glamour. Saying nought,  
Into his hand I put the year's first flower,  
And turned awa' to hide my face; and he . . .  
. . . He smiled . . . and at the smile, I knew,  
not why,  
It swam upon us, in a frosty pain,  
The end was come at last, at last, and Death

Was creeping ben, his shadow on our hearts.  
We gazed on Andrew, called him by his name,  
And touched him softly . . . and he lay awhile,  
His een upon the snow, in a dark dream,  
Yet neither heard nor saw ; but suddenly,  
He shook awa' the vision wi' a smile,  
Raised lustrous een, still smiling, to the sky,  
Next upon us, then dropt them to the flower  
That trembled in his hand, and murmured low,  
Like one that gladly murmurs to himsel'—  
“Out of the Snow, the Snowdrop—out of Death  
Comes Life ;” then closed his eyes and made a  
moan,  
And never spake another word again.

. . . And you think weel of Andrew's book?  
You think

That folk will love him, for the poetry's sake,  
Many a year to come? We take it kind  
You speak so weel of Andrew!—As for me,  
I can make naething of the printed book ;  
I am no scholar, sir, as I have said,  
And Mysie there can just read print a wee.  
Ay! we are feckless, ignorant of the world!  
And though 'twere joy to have our boy again  
And place him far above our lowly house,  
We like to think of Andrew as he was  
When, dumb and wee, he hung his gold and gems  
Round Mysie's neck ; or—as he is this night—

Lying asleep, his face to heaven — asleep,  
Near to our hearts, as when he was a bairn,  
Without the poetry and human pride  
That came between us to our grief, langsyne.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The speaker in this poem *lived*, as I have painted him, and died after the poem was written. It was from the living intercourse of such as he that I first began to awaken to the sense of the Divine life at work in the common world; and therefore, as I painted him in this early sketch, I leave him—adding only this last word of sympathy and reverence. The artistic quality of the sketch is another matter. It was written . . . in or about my twentieth year, when I tried with somewhat mistaken conceptions to disregard all adornment and rely on simple realistic substance. Strong earnestness in the artists is the sole justification of pictures so hard in outline; and whatever I lacked, I was terribly in earnest.



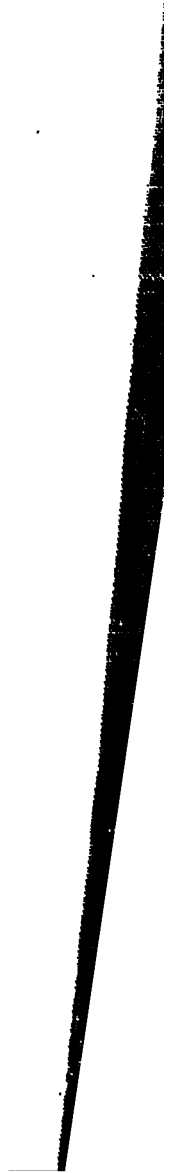
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